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Netherlands Number

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The Literary Review

F. Bordewijk **H. A. Gomperts**
Willem Frederik Hermans
Martinus Nijhoff **Remco Campert**
Gerard Kornelis van het Reve
H. J. Friedericy **Nescio**

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Editorial Notes

The literature of the Netherlands—from Henric van Veldeke, the country's earliest known poet (twelfth century), to Simon Vestdijk, its genius in contemporary *belles lettres*—provides a rich resource of writing that has barely been explored by the outside world, least of all by the United States. The neglect seems strange in view of the universal acclaim accorded Dutch arts other than letters, particularly its painting, which during the Renaissance was rivalled only by that of Italy.

Two reasons for the neglect have been suggested by Netherlands literary historians: first, Dutch literature, since it commands a comparatively small audience—some fifteen million people—is for most of the world a closed book; and, secondly, it has suffered from long periods of parochialism—this last in spite of the intermittent appearance of luminaries such as Willem the Minstrel, Vondel, Multatuli and Couperus.

Whatever the cause, the result is regrettable, for Netherlands literature includes many authors, works and unique values worthy of international attention; indeed, it is difficult to name another nation of equal population which has produced a greater number of eminent writers. Culturally, no less than commercially, the Netherlands has long served the world as a transit country. One has only to recall some of the many masterpieces of world literature that, as early as the seventeenth century, first appeared in Holland because the censor, of one sort or another, prevented their publication at home; for example, Descartes, *The Discourse on Method*, and various works by Voltaire and other eighteenth century philosophers. Living and writing in this literary melting

pot, Netherlands writers have been continuously nourished by trends and developments abroad, particularly those in France, Germany, England and the United States, whose languages most Netherlands writers read. Thus, in spite of parochialism, of tributes to the fashions and faults of the day, Netherlands literature has produced over the centuries a considerable body of significant work at once indigenous and universal in its sweep and perspective. At its best, this literature contains powerful currents of rigorous realism, mysticism, surrealism, many experimentalisms; indeed, it rarely relies on tulips and tiles, wooden shoes and windmills, and other properties sentimentally associated with the "quaint and cozy Dutch scene."

Modern Dutch writing particularly offers a rich fare in the novel, short story, poetry and essay, as the pages that follow demonstrate, yet, with the exception of Louis Couperus (1863-1923), the fine novelist who emancipated Netherlands literature at the turn of the century, few modern Dutch writers, particularly those of the past thirty years, have received much attention in the English-speaking world.

Happily, the Netherlands government is no longer content to let its literary light remain hidden. Three years ago it undertook the sponsorship of *Delta*, a review in English of arts, life and thought in the Netherlands, which presents proudly but without polemics. It also sponsors the Foundation for Translation, which seeks to interest foreign publishers and editors in publishing the best contemporary Dutch writing. Since Netherlands and Flemish culture are intimately related, the Belgian
(continue inside back cover)

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The Dutch titles of the publications have been Anglicized.

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NESCIO (1881-1961), pseudonym of J. H. F. Grönloh, published only a few short novels: *The Sponger*, *Little Titans*, and *Little Poet* (all 1918). *Mene Tekel* (1946) and *Over the Valley* (1961) are collections of short stories.

MARTINUS NIJHOFF (1894-1953), one of the most important reformers of modern Dutch poetry, also wrote essays and plays. His *Collected Works* appeared posthumously in 1954.

CH. EDGAR DU PERRON (1899-1940), born in Batavia, came to Europe when he was twenty. Chief works: *Scandal in Holland* (1939), novel; *Parlando* (1948), collected poems; *Country of Origin* (1935), autobiographical novel; *Narrow Base* (1934), essays; *In These Great Times*, notes from a diary; *The Man from Lebak* (1937), biography of Multatuli.

GERARD KORNELIS VAN HET REVE (1923-) published his long story, "The Decline of the Boslowits Family" (Continued on page 303)

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THE TRAVELERS' TREE (1959), lithograph by Lucebert. State Museum, Amsterdam

Miniature Literary Stratigraphy of Holland

J. J. OVERSTEEGEN

Translated by James Brockway

ATTEMPTING to describe the situation in an unfamiliar literature is rather like writing a report on some piece of geological research. You indicate strata and attempt to provide an historical explanation for the way in which one "generation" follows upon another. Only the geologist has an exact method and concrete material at his disposal which the historian of literature has to simulate. In his case, even the question of whether strata really exist cannot be answered without some subjective selection. What is more, when, after much argument, he has finally succeeded in persuading his readers to adopt a lenient attitude towards his efforts, he finds himself obliged to disturb the order of the strata himself—for they tend to merge into one another and only become distinct from a distance.

We do not have to seek far to find the cause of this lack of exactitude—it is living beings not fossils that matter. In the anthology for which this introduction is being written, the reader will find the work of a number of Dutch authors who have little more in common with one another than that they happen at the moment to be living and writing in the Netherlands. Here and there one can point to groups, conflicting attitudes, relationships, but these refer not so much to the work itself as to the circumstances in which it has come about, the network of facts encompassing the work.

The man who writes about an unfamiliar French or English author has a comparatively easy time of it. He can conceal his uncertainty by finding a place for the unknown writer somewhere among all the other well-known names. He can always expect the reader to be sufficiently informed to follow any comparisons he wishes to make. But in the case of Dutch authors practically all of them are unknown abroad. There can be no question of fitting

them into an existing pattern. The most one may assume is that the reader is *au fait* with the rough facts of the contemporary *history* of the Netherlands. So it is on to this, on to the non-literary facts, that we shall have to hitch our account, in order to avoid falling into such vague distortions as "X is the Dutch T. S. Eliot," "Y is related to Yeats"—statements which, though not necessarily untrue, nevertheless call for so much elucidation and so many reservations that it is better to dispense with them altogether.

In one highly essential respect this introduction will differ from the anthology which follows it—it will not be almost wholly confined to the work of living authors. All coherence would, after all, be lost, if we were to take the arbitrariness of human fate as our guide. The generation born around the turn of the century, for example, was lost almost to a man in World War II. The role it played in modern Dutch literature (and the influence it still exerts) is so important, however, that the development of that literature, insofar as it affects the present literary structure, would become incomprehensible if this all-important stage were to be omitted. Instead of attempting to describe the characteristic features on the basis of which one can classify the work of the authors included in the anthology into groups, we prefer to give a rough outline of the successive literary movements—the intermingling of the strata—in order to arrive at something resembling a cross-section of the present period, however incomplete, however relative in its significance, this may be.

After all, even if the literary generations amount to no more than the scaffolding essential to the literary historian, the *awareness* of generation definitely does. Just after the last war, many young writers, the *Vijftigers* (Men of the Fifties) or "Experimentalists" particularly, made so much of the gulf dividing them from their predecessors that it is impossible to describe their work without starting from the break with the past which they themselves regarded as complete. Without losing sight of the fact that now, ten years later, the differences between the men of the "fifties" are infinitely more pronounced than the things that bound them together at the outset, I shall attempt to indicate certain features they all have in common. Their actual work will then have to fill in the details

which distinguish the one from the other.

From 1885 on, when the Eighties Movement commenced its eruptive activity in the literary magazine, *De Nieuwe Gids* (*The New Guide*), aggressive protest to the existing situation has been a main characteristic of each new generation of Dutch writers seeking to establish itself. The attack almost always took as its target the insularity of Dutch intellectual life, the self-satisfaction of a small country whose works of literature only very rarely have to stand the test of comparison with works sprung from wider fields of culture, where the standards are higher—works, if you will, of European calibre. A social shift not infrequently lay at the root of such new literary movements, which is understandable enough in a country which since about 1880 has gradually been moving away from an upperclass civilization towards the Welfare State. Both these aspects characterized the Eighties Movement.

During the first three-quarters of the 19th century, literature in the Netherlands was a matter for patricians or hearthside versifiers among the *petit bourgeoisie*, but for an occasional striking exception like Multatuli. A typical feature of prose style, for instance, was the long sentence, absent from spoken Dutch, which betrays the direct influence of Latin. The secondary school of the period is still on the old grammar school model—where the emphasis was laid exclusively on classical literature, though this changed in 1876.

In 1863 an act of parliament instituted a new type of school—the *Hogere Burgerschool* (Burgher High School), which met a long-felt need among those destined for leading positions in trade and industry, now rapidly expanding, for a more practical school education. The outcome of the Liberal constitution of 1848, this new school produced, almost immediately, a new type of intellectual and thereby made further development possible. The Eighties Literary Movement and the broad cultural re-orientation that became discernable in the *Nieuwe Gids* can be seen, in one light, as a result of this change in the educational system. Some of the most important and most polemical of the *Nieuwe Gids* authors had been pupils at Amsterdam's first Burgher High School.

Teaching at this type of school had its gaze turned on the

present. Every attention was paid to modern languages as well as to mathematics and science, and this opened a window onto the living culture of England, France and Germany. Knowledge of what was going on in the large centres of art and culture was no longer the privilege of a very small group. Now, in 1960, we may take it that more than twenty per cent of the Dutch population acquires at least a rudimentary knowledge of the world's great literatures while still at school.

The effects of the change brought about by the Eighties Movement were of two kinds. In the first place, poetry was released from the "parlor game" prison into which Holland's literary isolation had landed it. It was only now that great English poets such as Keats and Shelley were really discovered. (Here we notice that "making up arrears" is definitely not foreign to the Eighties Movement.) In the second place, the style and tone of many *Tachtigers* (Men of the Eighties) were characterized by an aggressiveness which betrays distinct signs of the rancor felt by all *homines novi*.

Of course, it should not be concluded from this that all the *Tachtigers* were social revolutionaries. On the contrary! The champions of the "true" principles of the *Tachtigers*—who, for that matter, dominated the movement for a brief period only—were the protagonists of "beauty," of art for art's sake, and individualists of the extreme breed. Besides, some of the greatest, such as Gorter and Couperus, came from the old social élite. They, too, however, recognized the stimulating influence of the new—and experienced it deeply—as that refined poet Leopold did also.

The bond that held the *Tachtigers* together was their attitude of protest. Looking back, the careers of one or two of the great figures among them seem more interesting than the "struggle of the Titans" of the early period, which it is difficult at all times to take seriously. Nevertheless, this entire generation owed their freedom to develop their own talent their own way to the atmosphere created by the *Nieuwe Gids*—a fact which is too often overlooked. The "mirror from abroad" that the magazine introduced into the Dutch parlor could no longer be removed.

We mentioned above two writers who demonstrated immediately after the Eighties Movement that Dutch literature had grown

up—Herman Gorter—the poet who does not enjoy a world-wide reputation only because a poetry as richly nuanced and *avant-gardiste* as his is practically untranslatable—and Louis Couperus, who did make something of a world-reputation for himself, due particularly to the excellent English translations of his novels.

There is no point in recounting all the other names, though mention should be made of Herman Heijermans on account of his international fame as a dramatist. His social realm plays met with an unprecedented success in Holland, and no Dutch dramatist after him has succeeded in attracting the public's attention as he did. Neither should the name of Albert Verwey, the poet and essayist (known in Germany through his friend, Stefan George), be omitted, for the marked intellectual strain in his work and his own stimulating activity soon put an end to the paralyzing effect every lyrical revolution threatens to have on the succeeding generation. Almost all the "1910 Poets," like J. C. Bloem and Roland Holst, made their début in, or contributed to, Verwey's magazine, *De Beweging* (*The Movement*) and in the beginning his Platonically-tinted theories had an influence on all of them. This group are not revolutionaries and have little in common with one another. As far as age is concerned, that odd-man-out, Nescio, pseudonym of the author of some of the finest stories in the Dutch language, can be reckoned as one of this group.

This is the oldest generation represented here. The *Tachtigers* are all dead, the only author still living whose work retains traces of their movement (though mixed with many modern features) is the novelist, F. Bordewijk.

The chain reaction of revolutions which brought about a definite transformation in European writing towards the end of World War I did not leave the Netherlands unscathed either. From 1917 on, *De Stijl* (*The Style*) began to appear, with Mondrian among its contributors. The great influence this journal had on art and architecture is general knowledge. Its literary influence, however, was limited. This is saying a great deal, for *De Stijl* was the only magazine of any importance in the Netherlands to publish Dada writing. Another new magazine, *Het Getij* (*The Tide*), was too heterogene-

ous to found a modern school. This journal—and especially its editor Herman van den Bergh—exerted a stimulating influence for a brief period, though it is difficult to point to any lasting effects. The only important Dutch poet to associate himself with the general movement of change and revolution was H. Marsman. For a short period Marsman wrote a poetry associated to an extent with German expressionism. In his case, too, however, the relationship was superficial and of an ephemeral nature. Only few will prefer his early work to the more traditional poetry he wrote in the 'thirties.

In short, in Holland, the modernist literature of the years after 1917 had an artificial touch; the new ideas affected scarcely more than the outside shell, form. There were slogans in plenty, but they were unsupported by the feeling of alienation that had cut off the writers of the belligerent countries from the standards and forms of "*la belle époque*." Spontaneous and still convincing modernist work in Dutch was, however, written in Flanders—particularly by Paul van Ostayen. The Netherlands, peaceful, spared from war for over one hundred years, could not apparently provide the requisite climate for revolutionary reforms. They had to wait until after World War II.¹

Modernism in Dutch literature amounts, therefore, to a second-hand reform—a renaissance at one remove—just as the Dutchman had known World War I only from the papers, as an event taking place on the horizon. Like the political revolution attempted by the social democrat Troelstra in 1918—which failed for want of solid foundations—the literary revolution, too, remained in an embryonic state. If one wants to point to *enduring* changes in Dutch literature, one must not look for them in *De Stijl* or in the work of the younger Marsman, but in the poetry of that true dyed-in-the-wool Dutchman, Martinus Nijhoff, who if he did not introduce a new type of poetry certainly sounded a new note with his 1916 volume *De Wandelaar* (*The Hiker*).

The impressionist lyrical poetry of the *Tachtigers* had grown

¹ That Flemish authors could not be included in this collection is certainly a no less regrettable consequence of the program set for it as its restriction to living writers. The separation of North Netherlands literature from Flemish literature in the post-1920 period is nothing less than a risky surgical operation. Maybe a Belgian issue of this magazine will be possible sometime in the future to complete the picture of literature in the Dutch language.

out-of-date long before 1914. The poetry of ideas of the 1910 generation, too, was still marked by a special use of language, a "poetic mood," a "poetic note." Nijhoff on the other hand wrote poems which, while abandoning nothing of the expertise acquired down the centuries, draw their strength from the evocative power of ordinary language. He was not the first to do this, though he was certainly the first to do it at a high level of poetic performance. In this poetry, the depths and the surface are no longer opposed elements. This is not to say that Nijhoff's work is simple—we might, perhaps, speak of its "recondite lucidity." Few Dutch poems, for that matter, have set so many commentators at work as his great poem *Het Uur U* (*Zero Hour*).

Nijhoff's influence became apparent only gradually. For the time being it remained nothing more than a new possibility, his poetry an individual affair, like that of the 1910 generation—against whom he did not rebel either—Nijhoff was anything but an erector of barricades. The "younger poets," in the meantime, were marching determinedly up a *cul-de-sac*—that of new outward forms devoid of new inner content. A new poetic jargon—influenced mainly by Marsman, leading the van—developed. These were the signs of a new provincialism.

The easy-going confinement of their writing to poetry only was in itself a provincial trait. The essay and creative prose require more, especially in the way of originality and erudition, than the monthly poetic cash register can produce out of large but counterfeit and worn-out coin. In Holland, the over-estimation of the importance of poetry has time and again been a sign of provincial isolation. In the 'twenties prose was the business of the older writers like that "grand old man" Van Schendel, but for the isolated exception, like Helman. In order to obviate misunderstanding, it should be said that not all the young poets of the period lived by other men's pens. We need only mention Marsman, himself unaffected by the false rhetoric, and Slauerhoff. But their work only reached its full flowering towards the end of the 'twenties and during the 'thirties, by which time the whole picture had changed.

We are confining ourselves in this outline to the mainstream and therefore doing less than justice, though reluctantly, to those who lie

outside it. Thus we have made no mention, for instance, of the humanitarian group which, though reflecting a typically Dutch reaction to World War I, remained too much on one side of the general literary trend and too closely associated with what was only a passing phase (so that it has had no influence on contemporary writing) to receive special attention here.

We should also leave the local poetasters of the 'twenties unmentioned, were they not of negative significance. The atmosphere of self-satisfied insularity in which they bathed created the conditions for the most radical literary revolution (counter-revolution, others would say) which the Netherlands witnessed between 1885 and 1950, the Forum Movement.

About 1930 two essayists came to the fore who lived at odds with the existing literary set-up from the very outset. They were Edgar du Perron, born in Java and brought up in France, an "outsider," the friend of Malraux, Pascal Pia, and later also of Guilloux and Chiaramonte; and Menno ter Braak, an academic schooled in philosophy and history, who nurtured a deep-seated distrust of the flights and transports of the lyrical poets. From the moment they recognized each other as partners in the same cause, Du Perron and Ter Braak launched a joint offensive against the musty front-parlor atmosphere which dominated Dutch literary life, especially in the magazines. In 1932 they founded their own review, *Forum*, which, even in the first year of its appearance, succeeded in assembling around it nearly all writers of importance not associated with one or other of the religious groupings.

There were actually *two* Forum Movements—the nucleus formed by Ter Braak and Du Perron, with their aggressive standards, which were not always amicably received and not amicably intended either—and the circle of *Forum* contributors. Most of the writers who contributed to *Forum* entertained entirely different views from those of the two leaders and actually resembled each other in one respect only—they were all afflicted with an individual talent, a voice of their own. As a result of this, *Forum* was not merely a forum of opinion but an assembly of all existing powerful talents, to whatever generation they belonged. Roland Holst, Slauerhoff, Mars-

man, Greshoff, the Flemish authors Elsschot, Roelants and Walschap—these were among the review's contributors. Simon Vestdijk, too, launched upon his lightning career in its pages.

Looking back on it, the device adopted by *Forum's* editors, "personality as opposed to form," is not entirely clear, since, as Marsman was quick to point out, the two cannot be separated. But at the time they launched their movement, their intentions were clear enough: to put an end to the primacy of poetry, which was threatening to degenerate into a decorative art so that inadequate talents were getting a chance they did not deserve; to establish European standards of literary performance; to confront ethical or aesthetical vagueness with lucidity. No one since has seriously questioned these demands for lucidity and a high standard of literary performance.

Other ideas propagated by these writers did, however, meet with strong resistance. Thus Anton van Duinkerken, the Roman Catholic polemist, a product of the circle concentrated around the important journal *De Gemeenschap* (*The Community*), crossed swords with Ter Braak. For each of them, the fierce and absorbing polemics engaged in by the most erudite pagan and the most agile apologist among the younger Catholic authors of the time meant a loyal examination of his own position in the light of the views held by one who was its conscious opponent. It was a conflict by which the unbridgeable differences dividing them and the values they shared in common became apparent, values which were soon to prove of great significance in the coming fight against Fascism.

It need hardly be said that, the 'thirties being what they were, Ter Braak and Du Perron aimed the spearhead of their attack at another foe besides literary provincialism. It was precisely their intense concern with the living culture of Europe that obliged them—though not without some inner reluctance—to confront the rising Fascist movement. As the champions of intellectual integrity, of Diderot's *honnête homme*, of "human dignity," they opposed the Fascist "blood and soil" mythologies and likewise the communist "revolutionary administrators" with the same dislike of mediocrity, verbal fetishism and vulgarity that had determined their literary position. Each writer's *chef d'oeuvre*, Du Perron's *Land van*

Herkomst (Country of Origin) and Ter Braak's *Van Oude en Nieuwe Christenen* (On Christians Old and New), presents us with a personal formula of resistance and solidarity, reflecting the political choice of what Ter Braak had already termed "the politician without a party."

Neither Ter Braak nor Du Perron witnessed the German occupation of the Netherlands. On the day the Dutch army capitulated, May 14, 1940, Du Perron died of a heart attack. Ter Braak committed suicide. Not long afterwards, Marsman was drowned attempting to reach England. Thus the leading polemicists of a group which would have formed the older generation in the post-1945 period were missing when the roll was called after the war. It was a loss that could not be made good and which is still felt, even today.

In this collection of Dutch writing only one figure belonging to the Forum generation can be adequately represented, namely, Simon Vestdijk, actually a recalcitrant among his contemporaries, like Slauerhoff, who had died in 1936. Of the others, the editors have been able to include only one poem, since in the poetry section a little more flexibility has proved possible as regards the requirement that only living authors should be included. It is to be hoped that the work of Ter Braak and Du Perron will one day appear in book form in the world languages. The problems they were concerned with are still with us today, and their views so original that serious readers will feel attracted to their work, whatever their own background may be.

The young writers who came to the forefront in the years immediately prior to 1940 were also hampered in their development by the war. Their work represented a continuation of the Forum Movement in many respects, except one significant one—poetry gained an importance again. And no wonder—not so much because the Forum-authors had been anti-poetic and a reaction was now to be expected, but because from 1939 on the hopeless position (for the time being, at least) of the democracies on the continent was becoming ever clearer. The writers retreated in an anti-heroic attitude, best expressed in the poetry of "happiness in little things," as it has been called. Among those who can be said to belong to this generation, centered around the reviews *Werk* (Work) and *Criterium* (Cri-

terion), are Anna Blaman, Adriaan van der Veen, Adriaan Morriën, M. Vasalis, Gerrit Achterberg, Ed. Hoornik, Gerard den Brabander and—important on account of his theories of a romantic rationalism—Cola Debrot.

During the war cultural life in Holland lay paralyzed or went underground. There was such a thing as "poetry of the resistance," but it is almost exclusively a poetry of hate, honest but of little literary significance.

The shock of so beastly a war, coming after so long a period of peace, was difficult to assimilate, and after 1945 the world of Dutch writing, decimated and disorganized, took some time to recover. In numerous little magazines, most of them offsprings of the resistance movement, there was much talk about a literary renaissance, but practically no one succeeded in doing anything but mark time.

All the same, the first symptoms of a literary revolution were becoming discernible fairly soon after 1945. Only few, however, were quick to notice them, probably because of a fixed idea, fashioned by the war, of what the new movement would be like, but which did not tally with the actual situation.

In 1946 and 1947 fragments began to appear of two striking novels, namely Hermans' *De Tranen der Acacia's* (*The Tears of the Acacias*) and Van het Reve's *De Avonden* (*The Evenings*). There is not a trace of any literary polemics in either of these works, but when they appeared in book form, in 1948 and 1949 respectively, it was at once clear that a new attitude was being formulated. At the same time, the misunderstandings began. Many of the older generation judged these novels by inappropriate standards and consequently produced destructive criticism which had nothing at all to do with the actual works themselves.

During the 'thirties the core problem confronting the writer in the Netherlands was, as it was in other European countries, his relationship to society. Writers set against the amorality of the world of militarism and social rancour values which added up to an "anti-Philistine morality." They were *defending* themselves, and their defense involved the preservation of certain standards which they regarded as essential. These moral norms lost some of their validity

after the shaking experiences people had gone through in the war; the hold on life they had given the preceding generation seems to many to have lost its power. It is not his relationship to society that possesses a writer like Hermans, it is his own existence that has become a problem. He takes the pointlessness of life for granted, his question being: how can one live with this pointlessness? Norms and ideas are mere theory. Hermans is concerned only with facts. "I don't argue," he has written, "I demonstrate." Photographers and photography play important parts in his work. Ter Braak studied history, the perfect example of a subject concerned with *ideas*. Hermans' subject is geology—the facts about rocks and sand. He does not write about facts because he believes in objectivity, but because a factual account of reality, as the writer experiences it, has become the only account which achieves some (temporary) order in the surrounding chaos. To him, moral norms are the self-defense resorted to by "the others"; his leading characters make repeated attacks on what they can only see as the hypocrisy of all moral argument.

Van het Reve is less aggressive, but Hermans' equal in his preference for facts. The naming—and thereby the transfixing—of things describes a magic circle round his main characters, and its function is to defend them against an all-invading anxiety. Van het Reve's work is not even anti-moral like Hermans'—the moral category is entirely absent. Hermans and Van het Reve are vulnerable creatures bereft of the insulating, protective layer of ideas. "I'm writing with my back to the wall," Hermans once remarked.

The uncertainty about life which characterizes the work of these authors is apparent in another feature of Hermans' work, in the multiple interpretations of which reality is capable, and it is here that he parts company with Van het Reve and his traditional realism. To Hermans' mind, things enjoy a fixed form and coherence only by virtue of human thinking and human language. On this point a misunderstanding still exists between Hermans and his public, who cannot bring this anti-realistic aspect of his writing into line with his preference for concrete facts. He looks upon his least appreciated work, *De God Denkbaar, Denkbaar de God* (*The God Conceivable, Conceivable the God*), as his most important novel, and he is not play-acting. In this novel, every scene, every incident, is left "open";

there is no precisely described, delineated reality, but simply a stream of situations always susceptible of many different interpretations. It is this side of Hermans that explains why he published work in the literary magazine *Podium* (*Platform*), which in 1949 made the explosive reactions of the experimentalist poets known to a wider circle of readers.

It is difficult to place the *Vijftigers* (Men of the Fifties) or Experimentalists in a truly literary category. Too many influences converge in them. They display too many entirely new features. Insofar as the movement amounted to an attempt to catch up with poetry abroad, it is capable of definition. Now that the Netherlands, too, had experienced the horrors of total war, the blowing-up of age-old norms was not so very surprising. *Ecriture automatique*, use of the contrived fit of drunkenness to induce a *dérèglement des sens*, *collage*—all of it is catching up with arrears. But this is not sufficient to define or condemn the movement, as some here and there appear to think. These subsidiary aspects are not to be ignored. Nonetheless, one should not allow oneself to be persuaded by partisans, pro or contra, to take them as the criterion for estimating the real value of the Experimentalists.

It may be that we shall get closest to the heart of this (highly heterogeneous) experimental poetry by taking the long way round. To begin with, we can state that the revolution went hand in hand with a social shift no less radical than that of 1880. Before the war, if someone belonging to the working class began to write, he was expressly launched as a "poetry-writing-worker"—or his origins were kept a secret. During and after the last war, the cultural élite underwent a new expansion which made it far more democratic. Most Experimentalists come from a level of society which produced hardly any writers before the war. For them, the pre-war cultural pattern is not, as it is for their seniors, a matter to be taken for granted. In this respect (and only in this respect!) the Experimentalists can be likened to the Angry Young Men in England and to related younger groups in other countries.

The war aggravated this alienation from the old standards, though it was not its sole cause. This is why the comparison with

Dadaism or Surrealism breaks down too. In externals, these did have some influence, but a far more penetrating process of renewal took place at the heart of things. One cannot say that the Experimentalists have a *new* conception of reality. What they do is to reject any fixed conception of reality (for the time being), though in recent years there are signs of a change in this respect.

As with the prose writers, Hermans and Van het Reve, the experimentalist poets' point of departure is uncertainty about human existence. This uncertainty penetrates to the minutest movements of the poem, which is not a concisely-formulated definition of the poet's position but more like an auscultation of reality, to see how it reacts. Most of the Experimentalists reject anecdotal poetry, the dominant *genre* before the war.

A woman poet of the older generation once likened experimentalist poetry to the Rorschach test, an on-target comparison, because it illuminates the genuinely new aspect of this poetry. It is not the poet or his material that has changed but the relation of poet to reader. One can say that the experimental poem only begins to become a poem in the reader. It is a complex of association—possibilities which only take on a definite *form* after reception by the reader. The poem is a portion of reality, like a tree or a river. That tricks with a Dadaist touch about them sometimes come in handy in such poetry is not surprising. But they are not essential; neither should we attach too much importance to the patron saints some of the Experimentalists have chosen themselves—Eluard, Michaux, Pound. They are not without importance but they were definitely not the inspirers of the Dutch Experimentalist Movement.

I am obliged to confine myself here to these general remarks and consequently to do less than justice to the complexity of the actual situation. Thus I cannot go into the divergent paths that these poets have taken in recent years, paths which have taken Andreus, for instance, further and further away from his former comrade-in-arms; Lucebert. I have had to leave unmentioned the social views entertained by the latter, although these inform some of his best poems. Rodenko, the essayist, must also remain undiscussed, although the *Vijftigers'* sole theoretician. All this is due in part to limitations of space but also in part to this still new movement's understandable

lack of definite outlines. Many of the Experimentalists are still busy developing.

Fairly recently, a group of former contributors to *Podium* discussed the question how far the *Vijftigers* were in disagreement with ideas of the earlier *Forum* circle. One of their number very rightly remarked that such a confrontation of the two groups had little point—the Experimentalists were not writing to attack *Forum* ideas, they were by-passing them. Proof of this can be found in the absence of any real polemics between *Podium* and *Libertinage*, the other important literary magazine of the years around 1950.

Not all writers, of course, rushed to join the Experimentalists. H. A. Gomperts, one of the most interesting talents among those who began to write in the 1930s, collected around him in *Libertinage* a number of younger and older writers who had never felt that *Forum*'s problems have grown out-of-date. *Libertinage*, as a counter-theme, is not to be thought away, particularly owing to Gompert's richly varied talent as a critic. For us, there is no need to choose between the two and to throw away one of the children with the—naturally plentiful—bathwater. It is not a struggle between a new movement and the epigones of the old, or, vice versa, between critical intelligence and a new word-fetishism, but rather the complementary presence, side by side, of what one might sum up as "modern rationalism" and "modern romanticism," the form at present assumed in the Netherlands by two mainstreams of European culture.

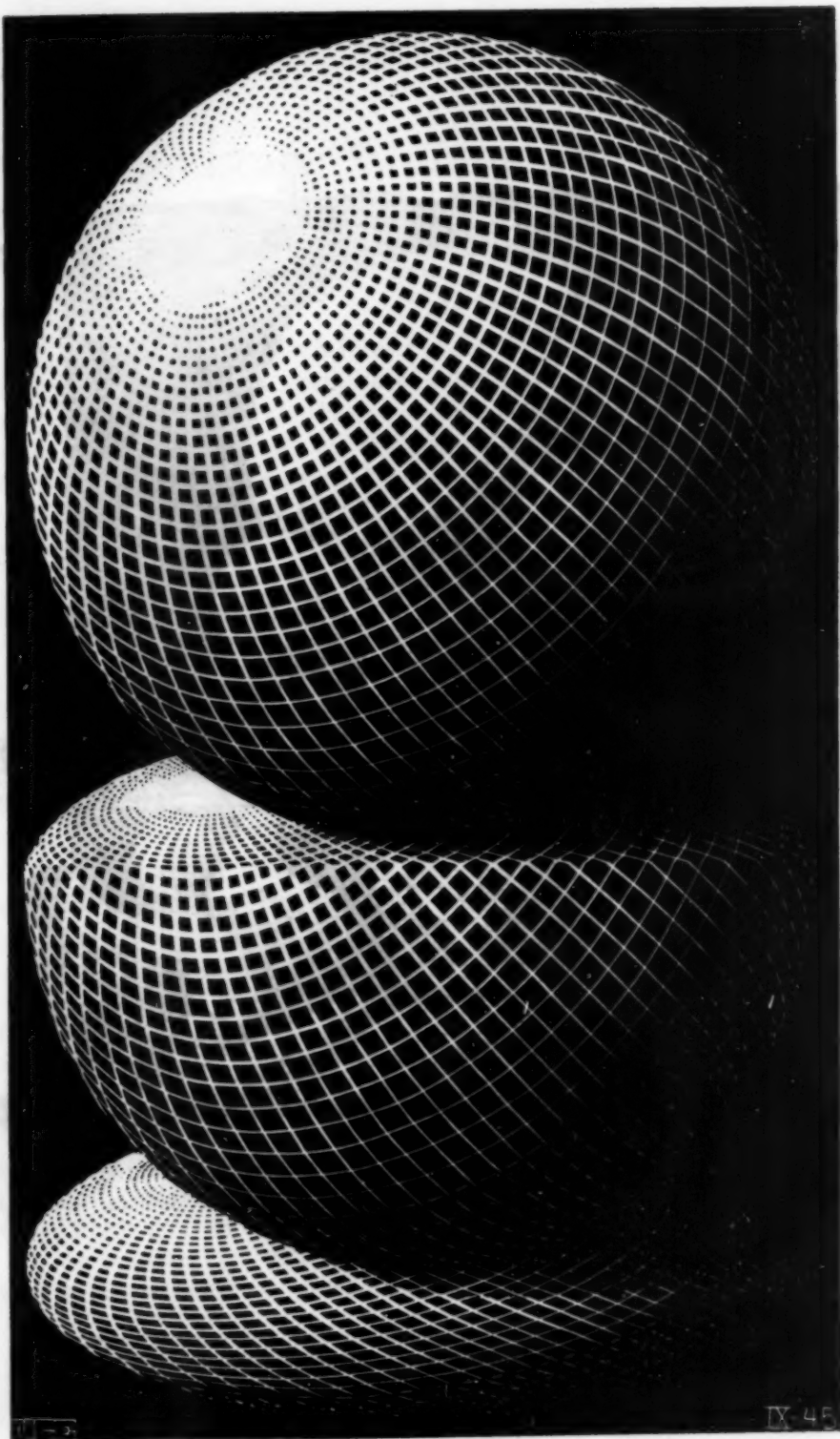
In recent years, for that matter, the conflict has not so much died down as been broken down. Former contributors to *Libertinage* write in *Podium*, *Podium* contributors have since become editors of a journal related to *Libertinage* (now deceased), namely *Tirade*. Moreover, a young novelist such as Harry Mulisch seeks the fulfilment of his talent along quite a different path—along the path of fantasy—one might almost say, of mythology.

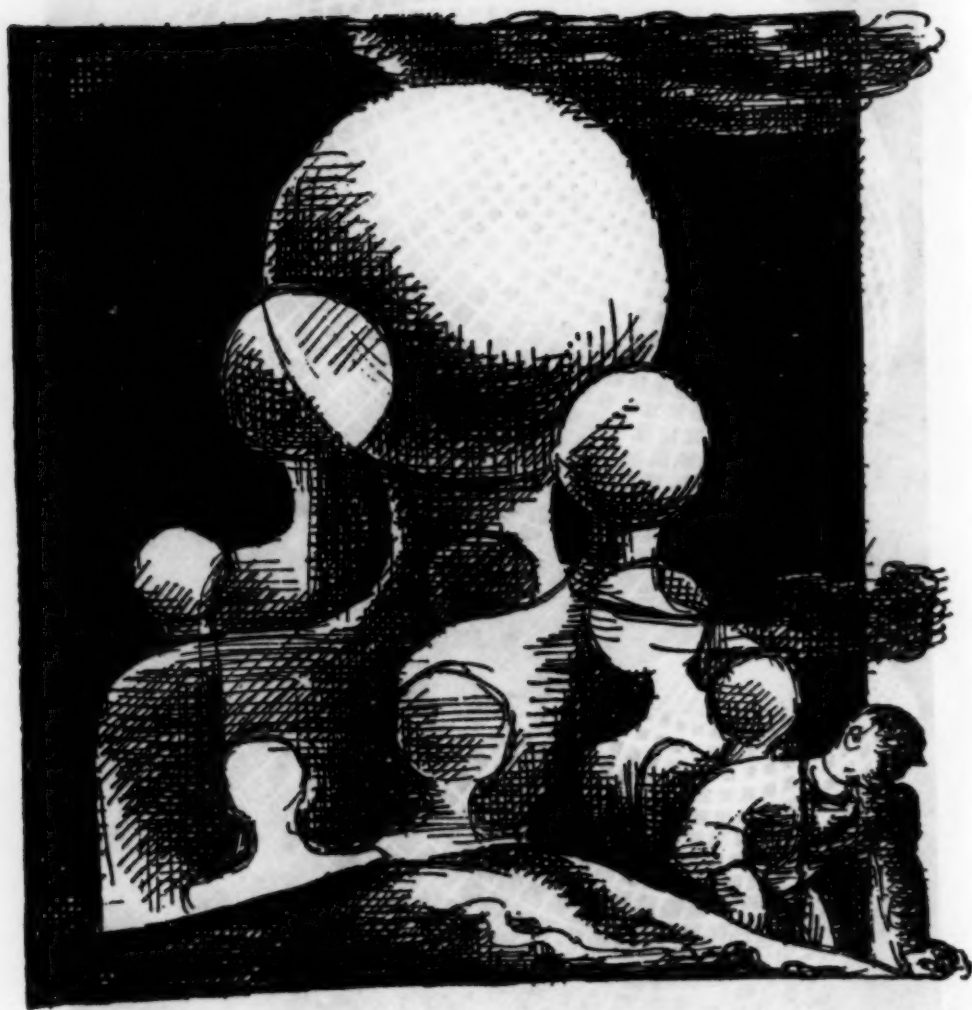
In his novel *Ik Heb Altijd Gelijk* (*I'm Always Right*), Hermans has depicted the situation of a soldier returning from Indonesia after the declaration of that country's independence. Life in our former colonies has, of course, provided inspiration for many of our writers; indeed, the theme can even be said to have become a pop-

ular one today, compared with earlier times. Thanks particularly to the influence of Du Perron who shortly before the war returned to the land of his birth for some years, an important group of younger writers grew up in Indonesia, almost all of whom are now living in the Netherlands. They include R. Nieuwenhuys (E. Breton de Nijs) and Beb Vuyk. Important authors writing outside this group have also come to the forefront—Maria Dermoût (two of whose novels are available in England, one, *De Tienduizend Dingen* (*The Ten Thousand Things*) having been translated into many languages), H. J. Friedericy and A. Alberts. But there is, of course, no future for this new branch of Dutch writing, and it is accordingly often permeated with melancholy—a “backward glance” literature.

And so we have arrived at the uppermost stratum in our literary stratigraphy—the present. All too much has had to remain unsaid; writers of importance have disappeared due to the exigencies of the program—where, for instance, could we have put Vestdijk, one of the greatest Dutch writers of the time? An extra place has been found for him in the anthology, and the emphasis therewith shifted to what should be the most important item of all in this Netherlands number—the work itself.

*Opposite page: THREE SPHERES, woodcut by
M. C. Escher. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam*





THE MASSES, pen drawing by C. Roelofs.
Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

Landscape Without Sun

SIMON VESTDIJK

Translated by Estelle Debrot

ALTHOUGH I am much fonder of the sun than I was in my youth—in my first youth, to be courteous to myself—I have only discovered during the last years that a landscape should be seen under an overcast sky in order to appreciate it in its finest details. As a vital, animal being, I have come to need the sun more and more, but as an aesthete, on the other hand, I reject this celestial globe and keep to a Cimmerian twilight. This does not mean that I do not prefer a stroll in sunny weather to one in drizzle; but this preference only concerns the stroller, not the painter, hidden in everyone, and in me too . . . What do the painters themselves think about it? Obviously, if their opinions could be called in, Ucello, Greco, Hercules, Seghers, Mathijs Maris and Van Gogh in his first period would definitely agree with me, while Canaletto, Tiepolo, Pieter de Hoogh, Constable, the pleinairists, the impressionists, Willem Maris and Van Gogh in his last period would fiercely contradict my sunless aestheticism. This being so, I see no other way than to set forth my views without the aid of experts and declare, as an independent layman, that, if I were a painter, I would never portray a cow with a glowing light for a coat, as Willem Maris did over and over again, let alone try to counterfeit the sun itself as Van Gogh did. I would not be addicted to this most important of all the fixed stars; I would not waste any stipples, dots, pats or whisks on it, nor pass yellow and white for gold and silver; no, I would forswear the sun, in the realization, that sunlight hides things from us as they really are, and deprives them of their true color and tone. A landscape under direct sunlight may be beautiful as an integral phenomenon; the landscape itself is seen misformed, heightened, flattered, touched-up by the sun.

Just use your eyes! A wood, a heath, a meadow show far finer tints of brown, purple or green on a drizzly afternoon than in the

sharp diffraction of light effects. Especially in our time, with photos, films and floodlights, these light effects—if one has an eye for them—look quite artificial. They are ridiculously and bombastically ready-made and blind and dull the painter's eye for colors; they emphasize everything that does not need emphasizing and wipe out everything that is essential. Coloristically speaking, non-diffusive is a disillusionment. Not light but color determines the real hallmark of objects; and in their turn colors live by the grace of shadow and twilight—as Goethe knew, with his scientifically untenable color theory, which however was the color theory of an artist. The sun, which does not belong to our earthly sphere, is a source of artificial light, not essentially different from magnesium light or neon lamps. That we cannot do without it as human beings does not mean that as painters we should be leagued to it. The effect of sunlight is always misleading, at most beautiful when one sees it, already much less so when it is studied in order to depict it, and definitely ugly once it is depicted.

The unavoidable complement: the unobstructed sunlight, the blue color of the sky, should also be forsworn. For this "true-blue" is not less an art product than the consumptive faces and squinting eyes on photos taken with a flash light. In reality the sky is colorless; it appears to be blue as a result of the unnecessarily complicated process of refraction to which the sun's rays in our atmosphere consider themselves bound in obedience; we are concerned here with a trick of physics, of as little interest to painters as the rainbow or a fire-spitting mountain. As to sunsets, those inflated imitations of cheap colored postcards, at least painters do not waste themselves on them any longer. Among our modern Dutch painters, I can only imagine a sunset by Willink, but then as a parody, with some robots and puppets in the foreground pointing out the marvellous colors to one another with their walking sticks. Something other than the excessive romanticism of the colors themselves will lie at the bottom of this praiseworthy aloofness. Otherwise the aloofness would have to be extended to parrots, chameleons and Persian rugs. It is the insight in cosmic artificiality that has put a painter's taboo on sunsets, the realization that it is not quite "real."

Nothing is lovelier than a wood on a sunny summer morning.

But the painter is not the guest to be invited there. It is the realm of artistic photographers and cinematographers, a world of vibrating light and optical illusions, of which the quivering refined exactness is reminiscent of a laboratory of physics, but which, unless all evidence is deceiving, will disappear from the art of painting, as being too photogenic. What a gorgeous feast for the eyes: a red beech tree, standing between us and the sun, on an early spring day! Blood drops against a blue background and underneath all the reds, golds and browns, resulting from a capricious complot between the real color of the leaves and the sunlight. But paint that beech tree, and no one will be convinced: it will look exaggerated. And it is true to the extent that not the painter but nature may be accused of exaggeration. In his red beech tree scenes, the painter usually remains *below* reality; it is the reality itself, the reality of the real woods-in-sunlight, that turns out unnatural and overdone, which fact only strikes us when we witness the attempt to transfer this unnatural nature into a supernatural painting. Proclaiming luminists will never agree with this. How happy they were with their sunlight, in their grey century of pessimism! But a greater refinement, more inner power, and a more essential optimism—the optimism that accepts things as they are—are part and parcel of always painting under an overcast sky. The effect of the red beech tree, mentioned above, can be ascribed to transmitted light, which transforms this really simple tree into a stuffed bird of paradise. But the sins of a glaring light are much more serious. The roguish pieces that commit the reflected light to leaves, roof tiles, milk pails and cows' backs are unforgivable. A thing that has become a mirror is no longer itself, but serves what it reflects: we do not look at a mirror but in the mirror, to see there something else than the mirror. And these reflecting objects, that can be found on paintings, are not even proper mirrors; for they do not reflect the objects, but only light: white, blinding sunlight, hard laboratory light, that inspires the painter to squeeze his tube of white: zinc for silver. Once set to work under the sun, a leaf is not only a simple green membrane but also—and especially in the spring, when it is shiny and wet—a photometric instrument, that adds still one more to the many second-hand silver scintillations. Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who is the most beautiful

one of all? No one is beautiful answers the sensible painter, only the sun thinks it is beautiful and showers us with mirrors in which to prove it. Just look with what unbearable highhandedness the sun goes to work on the bare branches of some shrubs: because in these cases the reflection remains at the same distance from the sun, concentric circles seem to spring up, hoops of light, that jump and sway with us when we move past the shrubs. I believe that Vincent once painted this circus-like phenomenon—quite out of keeping—for as a painter one should negate it. Such gross geometrization, such a violation of nature by nature should not be sanctioned by brush or crayon. And then there are the trunks of the birches and beeches that look so silver when the sun shines across them: luministic parvenus of the worst sort that lead painters into temptation.

Where there is sun, there is shadow; and shadows too have something on their conscience, since they deform objects and estrange them from their unchangeable existence. The shadow is a stroke of night across objects, blots them out, withdraws them from the fine examining eye. In the case of cast shadows, this is especially clear; with a "proper" shadow the relation is more complicated. A superficial observer could come to the conclusion that this shadow does not so much distort objects as clarify them. One could be of the opinion that the trunk of a tree only looks really round when the sun provides light and shadow. In the first place, exaggeration plays a part here too, because under these circumstances a trunk always looks rounder than it is in reality and would even look rounder than a normal cylindrical surface if the eye did not reject this illusion on the grounds of geometrical impossibility. Rounder than round is not possible, though the sun would have us believe this nonsense by bringing the lighted surface towards us and causing the sides, bathed in shadow, to recede. In the second place, there is no rule that a tree-trunk, which is round, must appear round, nor that the whole solar system should be mobilized to achieve this. A painter who cannot give the illusion of the roundness of tree trunks by fine nuances and suggestions of form with color and line, but who calls in the help of academic tricks with the use of highly glowing snow-white to coal-black, is a Sunday painter (or perhaps a sinful painter!). Every painter should know that light and shadow kill color—

too high a price to pay for a melodramatic contrast. The *View of Harlem* by Jacob van Ruysdael is a capital painting, with its wash of sun in a sea of moving shadows; but Vermeer's *View of Delft* is loftier art. Light and shadow—at least, the kind direct sunlight produces—are essentially unpictorial; they are more closely related to sculpture than to painting; they give evidence to a Michelangelesque captivation by the hard and angular plasticity of the old Greeks as a source of inspiration. But we must not forget that the old Greeks could not paint, with no offense to Apelles. Their art of painting is on the same level as their music and did not outgrow its swaddling clothes. And this was not a question of technique, but of too much sun in their country and too much sun in their spirit. Only among the Cimmerians could Greek painters of note have been found; and perhaps they have existed; but they lived too near to the underworld; all of their paintings have been collected in Hades; nothing has come down to us.

Young winter wheat under a March sky of grey clouds seems to me a classic example of what color can be as an indicator of things in their unadorned nakedness. Here we realize green for green, winter wheat for winter wheat, reality for reality. Under this sky the violet of twigs is the most moving dialogue ever written without words. Not that it has to be moving because of the melancholy or menacing mysteriousness of the grey atmosphere hovering over everything: it is moving because of the positiveness with which beautiful things, not weakened by the sun, reveal themselves. Here, instead of exuberance and clamorous effects, self-control and resignation reign supreme. One lives down to earth in these March fields; the Cosmic Falstaffs cannot look for anything here. Only serious people paint here, no solar dabblers. As in the woods too at this time when the firs, in all modesty, let their finest imaginable gamma of violet, green and brown play, and the flattering, austere lines of their trunks are not intercepted anywhere by enervating dashes of light, grimy smudges of shadow and reckless shiny leaves from the underbrush. At the entrance to these woods can be read quite clearly: luminists forbidden! Traps and pitfalls for Constable! The bad wolf for Willem Maris! The true color, the true line, a promise of the Real Thing on the other hand for the true and thoughtful

painters, who paint what there is and scorn what an illusive existence borrows from something that, at a distance of 150 million kilometres from us, acts as a busy-body and boss of the earth.

Perhaps this can all be looked upon as having a likeness to the "landscape of the soul." Is life not better understood in melancholy than in joy? Joy adds too much to things, conjures up things that do not exist, and weaves the Maya of the vigorously alive self-deception of the vigorously alive. Melancholy, provided it has not become set in despair, gives us a better chance to see existence in its true form. Not so much that existence in itself should be a sad affair; but because the melancholiac is more patient and attentive than the Merry Andrew who bolts through the world with so much sunshine on his back that even Willem Maris could not make a cow of it. The melancholiac lets as much light in his closed atmosphere as is needed to distinguish objects and to adjust himself to their objective existence; the merry fellow, on the other hand, invites them for a round dance, in which their own character gets lost, their dignity thrown away, their true proportions shifted. This can be amusing, and good for the blood circulation and for evocation; but apart from the dancing crowd sits the *Melancholia* of Dürer, surrounded by measuring instruments, and reflects and understands life.



THREE LITTLE COWS, ink drawing
by Gerrit Benner. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

Contemporary Significance of Dostoevsky's Novel *The Possessed*

H. A. GOMPERTS

Translated by James Brockway

COMMENTARIES on the political and philosophical aspects of Dostoevsky's novel *The Possessed* are plentiful. Yet since, as a pamphlet aimed at the Russian revolutionaries, it has even more topical significance today than at the time it was written, there is justification enough for drawing attention to the novel once again. In 1871-72, the date of its publication, it was a simpler matter to dismiss *The Possessed* as a malicious reactionary pamphlet than it is today. In this work, Dostoevsky describes how a handful of revolutionary-minded young men succeeded in stirring up turmoil in a provincial city. Today we can witness every day of our lives how their descendants are subjecting the entire world to the same course of treatment. It is definitely possible to scrutinize the contemporary foreign policy of Soviet Russia under the microscope of *The Possessed*—the *foreign* policy, because the first Russian revolutionaries Dostoevsky portrays for us dealt with their home country as hostile foreign territory which still had to be conquered.

At the present juncture we are no more able than Dostoevsky was to separate the political action of the novel from the disposition and the ideas of the characters who provide the action or who become its easy prey. The connection between such apparently disparate elements as radical liberalism, atheism, unlimited immorality, a suicide-provoking despair and political violence is already suggested by the term "nihilism," which was being used at the time in Russia to indicate all these things. Dostoevsky had had more personal experience of this nihilism than others who used the term. He had struggled inside him with it for years, like some physical disease which keeps revealing its presence by new symptoms.

Nietzsche, at a later date, placed the phenomenon more precisely in its philosophical—and, above all, in its historical—setting. He, too, had known it as a personal experience, but he also looked at it through the eyes of a philosopher of civilization—we might say through the eyes of civilization's doctor—and to this allied an attempt to find a remedy for it. Dostoevsky is Nietzsche's superior in the psychological diagnosis of the disease, but the remedy he suggests is typical of the simple-minded thinking of the patient. What he wants to do is to go back to the time before the disease set in—to the 18th, or preferably the 17th, century, when God and the Czar still sat squarely on their thrones.

We are quite justified in saying that at the time he was writing *The Possessed*, Dostoevsky was a diehard reactionary. This assertion does not, however, provide us with sufficient grounds for discrediting his account of nihilism as libellous, as modern Soviet criticism is wont to do—W. Yermilov, for instance, in his book on Dostoevsky. The reactionary reply to nihilism supplied in the novel by that unhappy, petrified figure, Ivan Shatov, is, after all, just one of the phenomenon's many consequences. Shatov's religious viewpoint is not, it is true, ridiculed like most of the other points of view in this book, but neither is it glorified any more than Kirillov's atheism, which leads to suicide. Dostoevsky the novelist is more "objective" than the private individual of the same name, which individual had to dismiss an internal conflict which the novelist was able to preserve intact.

The link forged in *The Possessed* between nihilism, appearing in the work in various forms, and revolutionary endeavour has accordingly retained its validity, despite the author's *parti pris*. Like the political methods the book puts forward for discussion, the nihilist background has acquired greater topical significance today, with the further spread of atheism, than it had a century ago. *The Possessed* is, in short, a book which continues to engage our attention on account of both its politics and its philosophy, one which every generation must judge afresh, in the light of its own experience.

Like Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, Dostoevsky's novel is based on an item of miscellaneous news, though in this instance it concerned a rather notorious affair.

Netchayov, a 22-year-old radical and anarchist, who arrived in Moscow in 1869, had given himself out to be the envoy of a widespread international organization. On November 21 of the same year, Ivanov, a student who, not without justification, had expressed doubts about this organization's existence, was murdered by five revolutionaries, headed by the said Netchayov. Three hundred people were arrested; many were condemned to terms of imprisonment or to exile, Netchayov alone succeeding in making his getaway abroad.

It was around this occurrence that Dostoevsky constructed his novel. Pyotr Stepanovitch Verhovensky is a copy of the revolutionary bandit, Netchayov. He is one of the liveliest, yet least alive, personages in the book, because his creator has approached him from the outside. Pyotr Stepanovitch is always on the move, always busy chattering away and intriguing. He is constantly applying the principles to be found in *A Revolutionary's Catechism*, a manual compiled jointly by Netchayov and Bakunin. According to this guide, the revolution demands a complete break with all laws, codes and moral injunctions of the civilized world, which are to be utterly destroyed. The revolutionary must serve this aim with a heart of ice, ready both to die and to kill for it. Liberals and radicals must be compromised until they, too, enlist in the revolution's ranks. In most cases they refuse to, and must accordingly be destroyed. The evils of the existing society must be magnified to the largest extent possible so that the people lose patience. Unrest must be sown by all manner of acts and violence to create the feeling that the established order is on the brink of collapse. Rumors must be spread, the underworld enlisted, the masses gradually worked up into a delirium of anxiety and fanaticism.

The author has drawn the character of Verhovensky on the lines of this blueprint, making of him a natural force entirely concentrated on disruption and outrage. For him the socialism the other revolutionaries dream of has lost all its significance. He is a revolutionary, but perhaps also a police spy. In his case, the aim of political agitation has been completely lost sight of. He is a virtuoso of agitation itself—intrigue, blackmail, denunciation, provocation, these are the tools with which he goes to work, feverishly confounding every-

thing and everyone. Verhovensky is the prototype of the conspirator who practices conspiracy as an art for art's sake.

It is not without reason that Dostoevsky has made this Pyotr Stepanovitch Verhovensky the son of another leading character in the book, Stepan Trofimovitch Verhovensky, a Western-orientated liberal, adherent of the French Revolution, and glorifier of science and art. It is, the author suggests, out of this type of democratic idealist—which he knew so well, since, as a member of the Petrayevsky circle, he was one himself—that the revolutionary bandit has been directly produced. Verhovensky Senior is one of the book's most successful characters. He is, true enough, designed as a caricature, and Dostoevsky is at pains to make him as absurd as possible, an empty windbag and an idle, old scrounger, strewing French sayings all around him as he goes; yet particularly when set against the hard-as-nails younger generation, this old idealist gradually endears himself to the author to such an extent that he ends up as one of the most venerable characters in the book. Dostoevsky hates liberalism; it exacerbates him. Yet he capitulates before certain liberals themselves, and for Stepan Trofimovitch, the half-baked scholar, he reserves the most intimate and touching love affair in the book. For twenty years, Varvara Petrovna, the autocratic landowner, and her protégé, Stepan Trofimovitch, are in love with each other without confessing their love to each other. They bicker incessantly, experience all the conflicts that necessarily ensue from a relationship founded on dependence and despotism—yet it is only after the eternal parasite has made an absurd attempt to re-establish his independence and lies dying that the all-important words are uttered.

The political sections of *The Possessed* can be seen as an ellipse of which the foci are the two Verhovenskys—the liberal of 1840 and the nihilist of 1870. The former is associated with a group of characters who are interested in enlightened ideas without having any direct part in them: Von Lembke, the provincial governor, who is prepared to accept the changes to come, once the time is ripe for them; his wife, Yulia Mihailovna, who is fascinated by the younger Verhovensky and who is convinced she will be able to reconcile conservatives, liberals and nihilists at her convivial *soirées*; and

Karmazinov, the author, an entirely westernized liberal and atheist, who approaches the young nihilists with caution and cunning. In the figure of Karmazinov, Dostoevsky sought to portray—and to ridicule—Turgenev, and the author of *Fathers and Sons* is, in fact, recognizable in the vain, precious celebrity he makes of Karmazinov, even though the portrait is out of proportion, due to an excess of hatred and envy on Dostoevsky's part.

For that matter, the figure of Turgenev is present all the time in Dostoevsky's novel, quite apart from this caricature. The book is partly a dialogue with Dostoevsky's more celebrated contemporary, who had made a sympathetic figure of the nihilist Bazarov in his *Fathers and Sons*. Dostoevsky now wished to show the nihilist in his true colors. Verhovensky Junior is his retort to the false (false in Dostoevsky's opinion, that is) figure of Bazarov. Turgenev, Bazarov's spiritual father, is exposed as a double-faced creature, as a deserter who has gone off to live abroad and who has betrayed Russia, as a wealthy profiteer, prepared to sell even his liberalism for a mess of pottage, and who was accordingly, with all his success, the inferior even of that *raté*, Stepan Trofimovitch, who at least entered the lists in defence of his liberal and aesthetic principles. It is possible that Dostoevsky's name for Stepan Trofimovitch's patroness, Varvara Petrovna, was no haphazard choice either, for this was, in fact, the name of Turgenev's mother, herself a domineering landowner. Shortly before, Dostoevsky had quarrelled with Turgenev in Baden Baden, having borrowed money from him which he was unable to repay, and had drawn up a memorandum of their exchange of words for the official archives. Turgenev, who in Dostoevsky's view spoke so affectedly, irritated him intensely, and although the figure of Karmazinov is an unfair attack and a misinterpretation of Turgenev's character, *The Possessed* as a whole owes much to Dostoevsky's intention to retort to, and to eclipse, the other writer.

The revolutionary characters which surround Verhovensky Junior are the actual "possessed," the petty bourgeois into whom the devils have entered. Besides thoroughly despicable creatures like Liputin and Lyamshin, the author has grouped a number of well-intentioned revolutionaries such as Virginsky, who does, in fact,

have a hand in Shatov's murder, but who mutters all the way through that it is an utterly mistaken deed; and his brother-in-law, Shigalov, the theoretician of the society that is destined to come into being after the revolution. Shigalov has explained in a lengthy essay how unbridled freedom can only lead to unbridled dictatorship. In his system, freedom can only be preserved for one-tenth of humanity, who should acquire unrestricted control over the fate of the rest. Only in this way, according to him, can the earthly paradise come about. Shigalov is the only one of the conspirators who has no hand in Shatov's murder, not because he has any moral objections to it, but because he argues that the deed cannot be of any use to the revolution.

The philosophical and religious sections of the work are concentrated around a single figure, that of Stavrogin. He has practically no connection with the political action of the book. Verhovensky the younger has, indeed, thought of according him the rôle of the passive leader and popular idol in his revolution, since Stavrogin, the aristocrat, is adored and respected without having to lift a finger. Stavrogin himself, however, lacks all enthusiasm for the rôle. He has vague ties with the revolutionaries just as he has vague relations with the government authorities. There is the same ambiguity about him which characterizes Verhovensky, whose spiritual projection he is, in fact; yet politics do not interest him; neither do intrigue or power: he is entirely absorbed by his own problem, nihilism.

Dostoevsky has given Stavrogin a Bible text of his own. It is Revelation, chapter 3, verse 16: "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot: I will spue thee out of my mouth." His nihilism is the nihilism of indifference, of the inability to feel anything at all, of the chagrin that brings all action to a stop. He believes in nothing; he hopes for nothing; there is no one he loves. He is the Russian Don Juan, who attempts to fill the emptiness of his existence by erotic enjoyment, by the gratification of loveless desire. He is more of a dissolute than a voluptuary. Out of boredom, or for a wager, he has secretly contracted a marriage with a lame moron. All his acts are challenges to the life, to the God, in which he does not believe; his sins seem to be the enticement of a punish-

ment which is never administered.

Stavrogin has two *aides-de-camp* who have little to do with him in the action of the novel, though they give the impression of having underground links with him: Shatov and Kirillov. They are the hot and the cold variants of the nihilist, of which he is the lukewarm variant. Like Dostoevsky himself, Shatov has turned his back on democratic and progressive ideas. He is dominated by a will to believe, to be orthodox. Kirillov is the cold one, who regards atheism as inevitable but at the same time impossible. Man, as he now is, cannot, according to him, live in a world devoid of God. This is one of the reasons for his suicide. The other is that by ending his life, man makes his own will sovereign and thereby takes the place of God. Kirillov is of the opinion that he has to commit this act in order to make it possible for the men of the future to live without God. So his is no ordinary suicide, but the self-crucifixion of an atheistic Jesus. Stavrogin himself discovers in his indifference sufficient of this coldness to end his own life in corresponding fashion.

All this sounds fairly sombre, and Stavrogin, who together with his two alter egos constitutes the nihilist basis of the book, is indeed an extremely sombre creation. Yet the greater part of *The Possessed* is written in a farcical key. Dostoevsky was chiefly concerned with demonstrating the absurd, the unbridled madness of the nihilist conspirators and to make quite clear to worthy liberals like Turgenev the chaotic consequences of their worthiness. Fascinating, too, for the contemporary reader of the book is the realization that the despair of the Stavrogins and the fraud of the Verhovenskys have come to dominate the world. Dostoevsky has revealed to us the birth of a political system in which the link connecting deeds with their consequences has been severed. Crimes, like the murder of Trotsky, are committed with an appeal to an ideal which has become lost in the mist, has become "nihilized."

Mr. Krushchev, whom some would like to regard as the herald of peace, is far more like one of Dostoevsky's possessed buffoons or conspirators, who seek to enlarge all conflicts and magnify all evils. The disillusionment of the communists and their fellow travellers when, after his death, Stalin's reputation was demolished, is pre-

cisely the same as the shock and disenchantment Dostoevsky has his group of revolutionaries experience when they realize that their ideals have led to nothing else but the wretched murder of Shatov.

Dostoevsky's analysis of revolutionary sentiment is one-sided and incomplete. It has other, beside nihilist, roots. Yet the truth of his thesis that humanitarian intentions evaporate when dogma and discipline get the better of men is still being proved every day of our lives.

Fin de Siècle

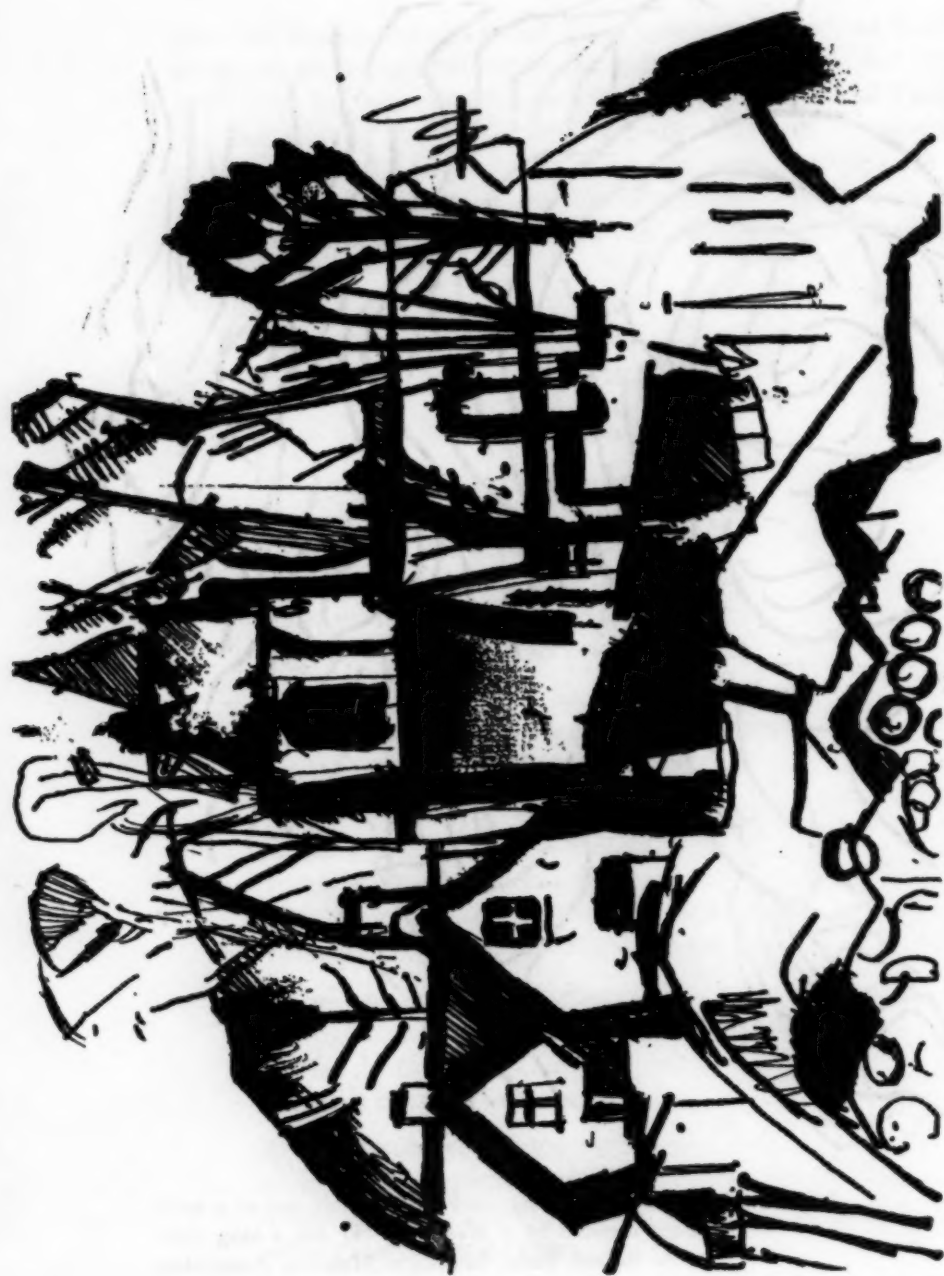
H. A. GOMPERTS

Translated by James Brockway

O day when women amid the trees
 sailed like ships along the Row,
 messages flashing from head to toe,
 the subtle language sailors use;
 frivolous play of sun on silk
 like the fluttering speech of flag and pennant,
 amazing the eye, yet the meaning patent:
 warfare, piracy, merchandise, pelf;
 white frigates laden with mighty flesh,
 beneath tremendous, maternal hats,
 and under their heaving bosom-bows red hearts
 rising and dipping madly with each breath;
 an open secret in their furtive gaze:
 the right to choose—tomorrow *morte ou folle*,
 but for the moment: woman in park with parasol,
 dignity's image in bows and lace.
 O day of calèches and impropriety,
 of fountains, emperors, spleen and czars,
 when women still moved like ships, all sails and spars,
 amid the summer greenery . . .



Untitled etching, by Friso ten Holt, one of a series of ten inspired by *A Winter By the Sea*, a long poem by A. Roland Holst. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam



CHURCH AMONG HOUSES, pen drawing by Herman J. Kruyder. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

Mene Tekel . . .

NESCIO

Translated by Roy Edwards

ONCE AGAIN the longest day had come and gone. The shortening of the days was hardly perceptible as yet, but we knew it—this summer, too, would pass. Once again the day had come to an end; once again the fiery red of the sky paled above the horizon, the water in the distance just kept its color, darkness crept up out of the earth once more, the canal in the distance had disappeared in the night. We were very sad about all the things which were gone, and about our lives, which would also have to end if all these things remained unaltered. For a few more times we would see the days lengthen; and then we would no longer be young. And after the white and red chestnut trees had flowered a few more times we would die, in the prime of life, or perhaps as frail old men, which would be even worse. And again the sky would be red, and the canal would no doubt still be there too, yellow in the twilight, and they would know nothing about it.

Then Bavink said: "I'm getting to be a famous man, I am," in the tone in which someone else would have said: "They've done me out of ten cents." And we all felt sold, all three of us, Bavink, Bekker and me.

And Bavink went on to tell us he'd had a visit from a gentleman he didn't know, a well-nourished little man in a frock coat. Bavink had remembered the bloke's name—I knew him well, he'd been at school with me when he was still only an ambitious youngster.

He had been instructed to call upon Bavink, he said—instructed by a newspaper founded by another ambitious gentleman, who squandered bags of money on it, took over the opinions, catch phrases and eccentricities of all kinds of people, and nevertheless still couldn't get to be famous, and so finally ended by dropping it all.

"Oho?" said I, "instructed, was he?" And we couldn't help

roaring with laughter, all three of us. Only Bekker was a little bit put out, 'cause he had a business and sometimes wore a frock coat himself, and had recently been to a client's funeral in a top hat and white tie, and had all but said a few words at the graveside, and had come home with a cold in the head.

And what had the little man come for, actually? "Only to meet me." "And did it go off all right?" "At first it did," said Bavink, "but I don't think the bloke could make me out very well."

Bavink had begun by saying he was incapable of talking seriously, and that's a queer start for a chap like that, who's nothing if not serious, and been *instructed* by his boss, and all. The bloke had laughed as well as he could and had said: "You are jesting, Mister Bavink."

Then even Bekker shook with laughter and swore that he, Bekker, was an idiot and that he would give up business and sell his frock coat and smoke cigars from the money he got for it. Which, of course, he didn't do.

And Bavink had replied that he wasn't jesting, and that had shaken the little man horribly. But he didn't dare show disdain for Bavink, because well-known people had told him that Bavink's paintings were "remarkably fine bits of work."

"Then I presume—" he'd said; and then he'd paused and straightened his pince-nez, and looked at Bavink, and then he'd said again: "I presume you put all your seriousness into your work?"

"I ask you, would you have known the right thing to do then, Cookybaker?" Bavink challenged me. The little man had spoken so respectfully that Bavink thought: "Here's a mighty queer cuss, an' no mistake," but didn't dare say anything.

"Know what I'd'a done, Bavink?" I said: "I'd 've asked him if he cared for a smoke."

"That's just exactly what I did do, and he said, No, thank you, I never smoke."

The chap spoke as if he was reading everything aloud out of the newspaper. He said he fully realized that Bavink didn't find it pleasant to talk about himself, *he* never liked doing it either, but, you understand, you can't always avoid doing it, life entails responsibilities, and an *artist* (the little man pronounced that word with

great emphasis) can't help more or less belonging to . . . Then Bavink reflected that there was no reason why he too shouldn't say something that sounded as if it came from a speech, and he said: "Hear, hear." The little man jumped in alarm. He was pleased to see that Mister Bavink thought just the same as he did on that point—chaps like him always call such a thing a "point"—and that gave him the courage to be so bold as to ask Mister Bavink whether it was true what had been in some papers—"journals," *he* called them—that Bavink was extremely, *ex-ter-reme-ly*, indifferent to fame?

"Jesus, there he had me," said Bavink. "I thought: if only Hoyer was here—*he* could hold forth and tell the bloke a thing or two."

"And what did you say?"

"I asked him, had that been in the paper? And he asked me, Don't you read the papers, then, just like a human being?"

"For Chrissake," said Bekker, "so the chap didn't come for nix, after all. Now he can put in his bleeding rag that Johannes Bavink, the celebrated painter, never reads a newspaper."

"I thought that straightaway," said Bavink. "I thought: now he's got something, now I'll *never* get rid of the perisher, he'll be bringing out his notebook any minute now."

"All sounds rather rotten to me," I said.

"Rotten, Cookybaker? There's no word to describe it! What was I to do? How the hell was I to get rid of him? The longer he sat there, the more room he took up. You could see the little man grow, my den was full of that little man, and the street was full of such little men—all the little men we've seen, the three of us and Hoyer, in all these years, about the town and everywhere else, were standing in the street, I knew they were! My den looked at me as if it didn't know me any more, I wasn't Bavink any more, I felt like I was Bekker with a manufacturer on the phone."

"Oh," said Bekker.

"That's possible," said I.

"D'you hear, Bekker?" said Bavink. "That's possible. It's a lousy feeling, you know, I'm real sorry for you."

"Oh," said Bekker.

We were silent for a moment.

"D'you remember, Cookybaker, at your last office, how you had

to ask whether the last voucher was on the spike, at night, before you went home?"

"Sure I do."

"And that whenever you asked that you felt like a horribly respectable member of society, with side whiskers and all?"

"And how!"

"Well, that was something like how I felt, I thought about you, I felt I was turning into one of them little men myself, simply because of the way that speciman sat there opposite me. I thought, presently I'm going to start talking about trends of thought, and where in the name o' God am I going to find the words? And all that happened in the time the little man needed to begin again and to say: "Now, Mister Bavink. . . ."

We were silent again. We thought: in the end they always got the better of you, the little men—there were so many of 'em, and they were always right. They had a reason for their existence. We hadn't—we had no reason for our existence. It *had* to be like that, it was God's will. Bekker looked down between his knees at the ground.

"And how did you get rid of him?" I asked.

"I got mad," said Bavink. "Jesus Christ. I can't help it, can I, that I make daubs and have to sell 'em? But I restrained myself. I interrupted him. 'Sir,' says I, 'I'm sorry I can't offer you any refreshment, but I've got nothing in the house.' (I spoke as posh as possible.) 'I don't think we understand each other.' He raised his eyebrows. 'Perhaps we'll understand each other better in ten years' time, but at the moment we don't understand each other.' I stood up and he stood up too. I said: 'I appreciate your good intentions—'"

"I appreciate your good intentions," said Bekker.

"Yes," said Bavink, "That's what I said. I ask you, where *did* I get those words from? 'I appreciate your good intentions, but I don't think I should be able to say one sensible word to you. If you really want to know something about me, go and see Mister Hoyer'"

"What?" Bekker and I exclaimed together.

"—go and see Mister Hoyer," I said, "In Van Woustraat. He's a painter too, same as me; he can tell you all you want to know, and

he talks like a newspaper anyway. Number 28, Van Woustraat'."

We sat dumbfounded.

The little man had gone on being very polite, had written down the address with a fountain pen, thanked Mister Bavink, and said: "Oh, please don't bother, I can find my own way out, thank you."

"If that bloke's at all smart," said Bekker, who had his own business, glancing up with his head between his hands, "he'll make a damn nice lil' article outa that. Doesn't matter about Hoyer, he don't deserve any better."

And we sat silent again, and pondered on the fact that we had no reason for our existence.

This was written donkey's years ago,
presumably in
1913 or 1914.

The Dunes at Evening

J. C. BLOEM

Translation by James Brockway

Lonelier the dunes as evening falls,
Louder sustained the sea's insistent moan,
A ship the room, grown stranger to its walls,
The silent house an isle, remote, forlorn.

Lonelier than the twilight paths that lead
From the house to that deathless murmur on the shore,
Is the heart that, irremediably betrayed,
Must learn to live each day on less than air.

A New Perspective

(from the novel *Veuve Vesuvius*)

F. BORDEWIJK

Translated by Alex Brotherton

THE BACK of a house, Wadmer had once reflected, is like the rear of a man or a woman. It shouldn't be seen. But later he came to think differently after the discovery he made.

He was sauntering one morning under the elms of the Hofspui, then suddenly he crossed over the broad roadway, just as the horse-tram had passed by, and turned into the Begijnestraat. Up till then he had been blamelessly unfamiliar with this street. He knew the reputation it had. But that did not mean that it was really dangerous. There were, of course, just as in any other city, dangerous, well-defined districts—unsafe for any stranger who obviously didn't belong. But then, in the first place, the danger at such an early hour was simply imaginary and, secondly, the Begijnestraat was notorious, but not dangerous. Wadmer, who knew his city and loved it, was well aware of this. Countless times he had walked past this corner without giving it a thought and now, all of a sudden, the street drew him from over the other side under the elms. He didn't know what it was, but it attracted the poet in him. He made a concession to the locality to the extent that his attitude, hitherto the incurious appreciation of a passing stroller, changed now to a personal interest that banished all indifference. He walked slowly and looked right and left, scrutinizing the shopfronts. He was right in the center of the French enclave. Two names on the one doorway, Seconnat and du Châtinier, then Dusoswa over a window filled with a sorry assortment of miserable odds and ends—Dusoswa, that would be a corruption of the original name—a café called au Vésuve, and a Widow Laburelle. He kept straight on, walking slowly towards the Kalvermarkt, past the row of little hotels with rooms to let by the hour, and then turned round to take another look at the names over the doorways.

He retraced his steps, this time following the street where it turned to the right, sauntering along beneath the network canopy of pulley hoists that protruded like inquisitive necks from the attic windows, until he reached the *Poten*, where he went and sat down in a *café*. The French community seemed to be comprised only of those first few houses. He hadn't run into any trouble. An uneventful excursion, he had seen hardly anyone about.

He had the street directory brought to his table and looked down the columns of names listed by streets. There were only a few names, most of them from the *Kalvermarkt*, not one from the *Schapensteeg*, and from the *Begijnestraat* only two, *Dusoswa* and widow *Laburelle*. For the first time in his life he realized that the address directory was not intended to be complete, that it was only the register at the Town Hall that gave all the names of the residents of the less respectable quarters.

The next morning he was back again for the second time. He stood in front of the *Café au Vésuve*, glancing in some perplexity from the name on the door to the painting of the volcano on the board above. This must be where the widow *Laburelle* lived. But what sort of Frenchwoman would be keeping a bar here? He looked again at the painting that had only recently been retouched in lurid hues portraying beyond all doubt a volcano belching forth a stream of fire. The widow had, by chance, come across the sign, already embellished with the inscription "*Au Vésuve*" in large letters at the bottom, amongst a secondhand dealer's wares. She thought it impressive, but it was just too big to fit in the fanlight above the entrance. So the bottom part had been sawed off and the name appeared, four times enlarged, on the window. This was how the *Café au Vésuve* had come into being, a mundane story that *Wadmer* and his companions would never have imagined.

Whenever anything attracted *Wadmer's* attention, he always wanted to know all there was to know about it. He was not exactly daring nor really timid, and he reflected circumspectly that he did not look like someone who would be worth robbing, that his appearance gave an impression of poverty rather than wealth, and even if his straw hat did suggest opulence, it was obviously from the previous year, and now dark yellow and rather weather-beaten. Re-

assured by these reflections, he stepped inside. He would have been in complete darkness—because of the board across the fanlight—but for an open door at the end of a narrow passage that apparently opened on to what would be a courtyard at the back. He could make out another door on the right. He went through into the taproom.

There was no one to be seen, no one serving, no one drinking. With the blinds half drawn, the colors in the room were soft and subdued. Wadmer found it not unpleasant. The floor was sprinkled with sand strewn in circles. The chairs and tables, arranged in neat rows, had an air of expectancy. The walls were covered with garish advertisements for every kind of alcoholic beverage. Four gaslights in dirty white globes hung on pretentious brackets along the wall. A sheet of polished zinc covered the top of the bar counter which was varnished a dark brown except for a strip near the floor. Behind the bar were colorfully glittering shelves lined with mirrors and bottles of all shapes and sizes. The ceiling was low, making the room seem longer and wider than it really was and giving an atmosphere of cheery comfort.

Katrien shuffled listlessly from out of a dark corner at the back of the bar counter, and stood there as if behind a rampart. She said nothing, inquiring only with a wrinkling of her small forehead, the brows raised, the eyes a dull bronze. She had darkish hair carelessly combed. There was a vagueness about her pallid figure of a ghost that had lost its way.

Wadmer had decided to order a drink that couldn't be tampered with. He asked for a bottle of beer.

"Yes, certainly, sir, certainly," came, unexpectedly, the sound of a rapid flow of words from the other end of the room. "Beer, of course, but there aren't any bottles, we only have it from the keg. Get a move on, Katrien."

The widow had appeared by the door of the passage, and she observed him with a sharp, almost menacing look. The strong, well-shaped teeth laughed politely in the small withered mouth in the grubby-brown, tired face. Her hands were still gesturing after she had spoken.

"Perhaps I could sit in the courtyard?" Wadmer asked. "It's such a fine day."

"Certainly, sir, we have a table there."

She led the way, in her slippers, through the passage, past the open door of a windowless, dirty kitchen where a large gaslight was burning. Wadmer seated himself at the table under a balcony. The widow stamped her foot at a scraggy chicken that had got loose from the pen.

"Get back in, you, what's the matter with you?"

She lost a slipper and laughed uproariously, almost shrieking. The chicken scuttled back into the pen, and the widow bolted it shut. Katrien slouched out bringing a large mug of beer with the froth dripping over the edge. Wadmer sat looking around him. He felt a strange contentment and lit a cigarette to make it complete. The beer tasted cold and fresh.

He relaxed in a pleasurable awareness of the benign warmth of the early summer. He had often reflected that the city, too, bloomed with the summer—above all, it had an agreeable smell. There were many who would not appreciate that, he mused, but he did. Only the garbage stunk, but then the garbage stunk in the countryside as well, and it could, after all, be avoided. He always tried to, savoring sometimes the acrid tang of a tarred roadway, sometimes the warm pungency of linseed oil from a freshly painted housefront in the sun, or the smell of cobblestones and bricks, the smell of dry wood, the smell of the coffee houses, the quickly fading, musty smell of the streets after a shower of rain. Here, the smell was different, a mingled fragrance from a dozen sun-drenched, small courtyards.

After a couple of sips of his beer he got up and walked over to the dividing fence. It was so low that he could have looked over it from where he had been sitting. He saw a large rectangle of small courtyards enclosed by brick buildings on each side. The tallest were those in the Hofspui and the Poten. Further off, to the left, was the sombre edifice of the Salvation Army. On the remaining two sides were the tumbledown houses of the Street.

He turned round and regarded the back of the café. He noticed that the balcony he had been sitting under was of stone, held by two solid supports, with a wrought-iron railing, and behind it a French window that stood open. He couldn't understand why a balcony came to be there, but suddenly he understood, or he thought

he had found the explanation. The builder must have set his heart on having a balcony, but the regulations did not allow one at the front, so it had to go at the back. The back was given precedence over the front to become unique in its surroundings.

He finished his beer and seeing the widow, who had been hovering invisibly round him all the time, standing in the passage, he asked if he could see round upstairs. She looked at him strangely.

"Certainly, sir, just follow me."

She went on up a winding stairway. In the darkness of the landing he hesitated, his hand going mechanically to the pocket where he kept his wallet.

"That's m'daughter's room," she said.

He couldn't see anything, but he heard the swish of her arm pointing somewhere near him. Then he found himself in an extraordinarily obscene deep red room. Here too? But this was only a café.

A moment later on the balcony he had no thought for anything but the panorama he surveyed. Below him lay a whole universe of courtyards marked out by odd strips of fencing and straggling hedges, by a dried-up ditch, and here and there by rows of sticks. He saw a pigeon loft with a narrow ledge around it on which ash-grey pigeons strutted, their heads bobbing rhythmically up and down. He saw a scattered profusion of flowers growing in unkempt clusters, little vegetable plots, an apple tree, rabbit hutches, a lattice summer-house with a vine half-covering it, then, right in the center, an imposing stone pump, and at the pump a whore with a gruesomely carmined mouth. She stood with her face towards him without seeing him. He couldn't stop looking at this woman whom he would never set eyes on again. Finally it was only her movements that he saw. She swung the pump handle with powerful strokes, slowly, regularly, and the brass flashed relentlessly in the sun. He saw the water splashing in heavy gushes into the bucket. Beside it were two others. He took in every detail. It gripped him, this harmony of human labor and the purest of natural elements. Perhaps she had polished the brass herself, taking a pride in its gleaming smoothness. She was, for that moment, a queen holding sway over the austere pump and the pure flowing water. A whore, he reflected, is not just a whore, words are only conventions. With a shock he realized what

mysterious complexities words leave unrevealed. The thought depressed him. When all three buckets were filled and she bent to lift them on a yoke across her shoulders, he made his way back to the street.

His good humor returned. He would come here again, that he was resolved to do.

Thinking of Holland

H. MARSMAN

Translated by James Brockway

Thinking of Holland
I see broad rivers
languidly winding
through endless fen,
lines of incredibly
tenuous poplars
like giant plumes
on the polder's rim;
and sunk in tremendous
open expanses,
the farmsteads scattered
across the plain:
coppices, hamlets,
squat towers and churches
and elms composing
a rich domain.
Low leans the sky
and slowly the sun
in mist of mother
of pearl grows blurred,
and far and wide
the voice of the water,
of endless disaster,
is heard and feared.

The Stone Face

SIMON VESTDIJK

Translated by Roy Edwards

THE THIRD HOUSE, which came forward out of the night and at the same time, as though with a gesture of reserve, allowed the light of my torch to skim untouched along its façade, was larger than either of the other two. A hatlike roof rose in the livid darkness; some low outbuildings stood at the side. The house lay fairly close to the road, and when my eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the scanty light I perceived that the entrance was in a side road—or perhaps that road, into which mine must come out, was the main road, for it was difficult to judge their relative width.

For a while the problem of those two roads took the place of that which should by rights have concerned me so much more; but then, tearing myself with an effort out of the vain reverie, I began to think hard about my situation. I must have lost my way. If it came to that, my host had warned me about this part of the road . . . how I wished I was back in his villa in the dunes, with the two shaded lamps, under which our red wine had sparkled! But he had warned me about vigilant watchdogs, not about what I was going to experience now. Experience: with a certain foretaste already of mysteries, which seemed to come from the night wind and couch on my tongue over which my own winy breath blew to meet me . . .

Let's say I recognized the region. Not as any identifiable part of this dune area, where I might therefore have been before, but as something about which one's read long ago, or dreamt about, and of which one's always carried the vaguely outlined sketch around with one. Every landscape numbers some of those road systems which, like Gordian knots in a harmless-looking net, wait for years, for centuries even, for the traveller who is to get entangled in them. As often as not there stands in such districts an old mill whose sails are missing, looking like a guide who's given up and stands in the act of drawing in his arm dejectedly. Cats prowl around there. Those

places ought to be indicated on the map by a special color, but no! . . . Since they must not look like each other—that would make it only too easy!—each of them, again, differs in other minor details, in the present case in possessing those big, isolated houses which, well-nigh feudal, have annexed whole chunks of their surroundings and registered them as dark and inaccessible demesnes, or as that deserted garden—one knows it's there, even though one doesn't see it—with the two broken plaster figures in it and many gusts of wind where of old the arbour used to stand . . .

And I asked myself *why*, in the dark and in such equivocal places, the world has to be so different, so much deeper, more despairing, and with that certain dissimulation which constitutes the candor of night . . . Let me go on dreaming for a bit, I thought, until I'm past this house, for it can't bode much good to me . . . Two plaster figures, broken, but of the same workmanship? . . . Let's suppose so. Let's believe that the wind actually did go back into that garden and create from nothing a life which was lost again and yet is still there, even though one doesn't see it by day . . . Once more I tore myself out of musings which could be of no possible use—the prolix, free translation of four glasses of wine and wild conversations . . .

Close in front of me the road seemed suddenly to break off short; the line where it ended glimmered there, widely separated paving stones gave place to a little wilderness of thistles and refuse. There the cats must be prowling, there the mill had stood, or the burnt-down farmhouse, or what have you. And perhaps the center was there too—the nodal point, the solitude of solitudes, where all threads came together; I had expected to get there, but still could not get there, even though I was there now . . . my thoughts ran into confusion afresh.

The torch, my Alexander's sword, would now have to find everything for me, and liberate me from this confusion. For a few moments, it distracted me: a circular patch, which became elliptical, stuck out an arm, took in the night in a wide embrace, and hesitating, hovering, almost throbbing with the throbbing of my pulse, returned, halfway, then disintegrated in a rain of livid light on leaves and pebbles, or groped along planks over which splinters, knots, and nailheads came running to meet it like mad. But then the house

attracted my attention again, standing there so tall and isolated. Long, straight walls—the kind of walls to walk past after a nocturnal conversation that asks from us no anguish but only apathy . . . I could not at first make out in what way the façade was ornamented or overgrown. But my light soon discovered the fantastic, caressing climbing plants which writhed their way upwards in arcs as though seeking a window or a hand—each branch, each leaf swiftly provided with a Chinese silhouette behind it, which moved a short distance away from it, crept back and then instantly grew sharper. I distinguished stone frames round the windows, in front of which shutters had been closed. I made my cone of light rise and fall several times more, meanwhile forming the resolution to walk on and look for the road in accordance with my friend's directions, when the light fastened on to something above me—and fastened me with it, as if I was directed by a power in or on the house, which had seized the torch. I looked more closely: *there*, a solemn stone head! I was amazed. I was even overcome by a certain hilarity—a series of fits of laughter somewhere in my body which, however, could not penetrate to my still fuddled wits. That doesn't alter the fact that I immediately felt linked with that stone head as with a companion in distress: he too had gone astray, one might assume; he too—

I suddenly saw the ivy as vine tendrils—must be intoxicated, lost, an outcast from life, even though it would not be easy to determine whether he was all those things by day, when walls, plants and stone ornaments lead an existence so totally different from the one they lead at night. No . . . little could be said about that. Did he, for instance, like living in the light, or was he a born solitary, a dweller in shadow? By day he remained almost invisible, behind that tangle of branches which sprouted from his skull in all directions like rather too luxuriant antlers. Thus he lived as in a cool cave. But now, at this hour in the night, my light caught him in the right place, unclosed his eyelids, dilated his nostrils and at last, when my hand had ceased to tremble quite so much, showed his forehead, exalted high above the broad shadows of the eyebrows, which it bestrode like weary thoughts. The direction in which the eyes were looking was indeterminate, but their expression distinctly voiced satisfaction at having below them someone who wished to set in light the for-

gotten one of that house! A serene smile, a few little lines in the corners of the eyes; and I had already ceased to regret my night journey. Steadily I trained the torch on him, in order in this way to awaken new life in one who, through chill communion with leaf and stem, could no longer be used to anything but the color of green mould—who had enjoyed no accentuation of relief for years, and now tasted the light as though from behind vines. I had been drinking: *he* had to drink too; I gave him plenty. The twigs thrashed to and fro in the wind, but I would not be driven away, no matter how much they whipped and waved. I had found a confidant. Who was he? Had this house more of such heads? But no—that I refused to believe; how could it be so, anyway, now that I had found him and wanted to stay with him till morning, and not go away before all loneliness and privation had been shone out of his face! . . .

But my light cone slipped off, suddenly, through an involuntary movement of my hand. Now I had to look for him! High and low, left and right, of course he must still be there . . . *There*, I caught him full in the face, as with a snowball; he laughed. That face looked young now, younger than it had a few minutes before, and the ivy tendrils suited it better. And even though my hand trembled unconscionably, I wanted to keep on as long as possible, for it really seemed as if he changed under the light, became more and more youthful under my hand, pristine and revived as an antique god. Was I creating him myself, out of nothing? Was it possible to make statues of marble or stone assume any age by shining any light on them? But anyway, I was the creator, he owed everything to me—everything, to the very vines which, red-translucent, grew up contrastingly out of the green, under the magic power of my circle of light. And, although the night wind grew colder, making me shiver and button my clothes up more, over and over again I lost myself in contemplating the stone face, which glowed with inviolable youth.

Inviolable? Arrived at a climax which seemed not easy to surpass, he nevertheless appeared to be rebelling against something, to be trying to overcome something, in doing which my torch would have to help him. Carefully I directed the beam in such a way that as few branches as possible cast shadows; but there was always one which would not be put aside—a thick, hairy one. I could distinguish

it clearly from below. Then, when I lowered the torch a little, he suddenly looked like a drowned man, ashen and bloated, among seaweed and polyps; but how quickly that image was banished! My stone face lived and re-lived, over and over again, feverishly and unquenchably; he drank my light, he shone out in all directions, though I could never rout that high shadow out of his eyebrows and send it in retreat over his forehead, because I was standing too far below. So I walked back in order to try from a greater distance. In the twinkling of an eye he had disappeared. It's not surprising that he's rarely to be seen by day, I thought; what wouldn't he give, always to have such a life as he's having now! From time to time it seemed again as if a smile was playing round his lips, but now it remained a smile of youth, matter-of-course and effortless. Youth hasn't acquired enough wrinkles to be able really to smile; it was the natural smile of sleep and innocence, which I had conjured up there with a single turn of the hand.

But the night wore on, and with that an insidious change came into his face—a change which had already announced itself before for odd moments, when the shadows played over his features. Wrinkles returned, crystallized, first hid themselves in the corners of mouth and eyes, then shot across cheeks and forehead. Painful furrows clashed with each other; they cancelled each other out for a spell, but then everything slid irresistibly towards old age. How was I to preserve him from it? I kept my hand as steady as possible; no condensed moisture dulled the glass of the torch; no chill mist drove past. For a moment he gazed at me as if reproachfully, before subsiding still deeper in his own dissolution, corroded by a fatal decay which I so desperately wanted to arrest, for I felt that now everything was at stake, that within a few minutes he would be past saving . . . All about me was complete solitude, no dog barked, there was no light anywhere, the house seemed unoccupied. Every chance was in my favor, if only my will remained equal to the task! I continued to hope—nay, I believed, I insisted, that the process of rejuvenation would begin again. But it was not only age from which he was suffering now; it was also pain, sorrow, despair, fear of death . . . That night I saw every possible expression of human woe glide across stone, faint but unmistakable and not susceptible of any

explanation other than the painful emotions they evoked in myself.

Then, again, it was as if he was on the point of coming down to whisper his secret to me, a secret which would rob me of all peace of mind forever; he begged, he prayed, his cheeks fell in, stubble sprouted swiftly on them, growing grey under the light; if he had had a body he would have knelt, or writhed in pain, but his body wasn't there, after all, his body was the house, the ground on which the house was built, the fields round it, the night . . . and how ancient and far-off and elusive is the night! . . . And then I suddenly realized that *he* must be the one condemned to unrest who ruled this landscape and who had lured me thither to assert his wretchedness! I was seized by a feeling of impotence. I wanted to go, but could not. Scraps, fragments of my first thoughts, flashed across my mind, and behind them a new thought loomed up, not yet to be put into words—a thought for which I was not yet ready because all my attention was occupied . . . My arm grew stiff; with muscles that were already losing their strength, I trained the light on the same spot. And his eyes just stared, stared—and sucked me slowly towards them . . .

At that moment I heard the crunching of gravel: footsteps! Instinctively I dropped the beam of my torch. I expected a cry, as if I had wounded him or torn a bandage from his face. But the first change initiated by those sounds took place in myself. It was the rudimentary thought of just now which came to the fore, as though round a corner of my consciousness, in its full shape and accompanied by all the symptoms of sobering-up after my slight intoxication. In three seconds I knew everything again, in three seconds I had fallen back thirteen years, back through the night, through time. Hurriedly the thought suffered itself to be examined from all sides, like a beggar who shows his wounds, who becomes one with the giver of alms, cleaves to him, and would like nothing better than to pass on to him all the diseases ravaging his carcass in order to be sure of getting the compassion he asks for . . . Sickness, death, a deathbed? . . . Yes, I had watched beside *him*, my father, for a whole night, struggling against sleep and ennui. A long night of emptiness, and one in which no thoughts of any importance could have touched my mind. Towards morning he called me to him, with his feeble

voice, and then I saw that he had become young again, like the stone image just now, unwrinkled and carefree before he died, as if he wanted to recover a long-past fragment of his youth and in doing so was not content merely with thinking and dreaming, but had also adapted his outward appearance accordingly. Even then he had almost lost the power of speech, and half an hour later it was all over. But who can tell what childlike game occupied him a few minutes before his death—in what childlike difficulties he was still entangled? Who knows how much labor it cost him to go back so far in his life, which had already almost ceased to be life? How strange and inexplicable, this return into oneself, this completion of the circle, in which life, by throwing youth out like an extreme loop round the farthest point of old age and drawing it tight, ties itself in a knot which can never be untied . . . And I? To think that I saw it and didn't understand! To think that it was my father and yet someone else—an ordinary, untragic deathbed without grand gestures, which I had thought about very little in those thirteen years—and that I understood it only now that it was too late, even after this warning, this notification—too late for the one who had stirred that memory awake again . . . !

Sounds . . . outside me again now!

A door was opened, words were spoken: a woman's voice. At the same time blinding light blazed up, evoking an unreal hard garden, such as I could not have expected to find there. Close-cropped yew hedges cut through the night in horribly straight lines, their leaves like little chisels crowded viciously and densely together; each small gravel pebble seemed to glitter separately, without joining up with the one next to it. Before me lay the beginning of an entrance drive for machines, white, smooth and soul-less. When I moved a little to the left, I saw the electric lamp above the door, which was standing half open; on the top step lay an iron scraper mat. The figure of a man was moving down the drive in my direction, youthful and slender but almost staggering as he walked. Behind, at a slower pace, came a woman, much older than he, with grey hair through which the light shone silver, who now called for the second time a name I could not catch . . . But the young man had already reached me, and seized me tightly by the arm:

"He's dead, and you could have saved him! If you'd only come sooner! He's dead, he's dead . . ."

His voice was hoarse and trembling. I looked him straight in the face, which still caught some reflected light—a distorted, confused face, pale as death, with eyes like abysses; and everything framed in long, black hair. With his unformed features, from which the nose, isolated and helpless, seemed to detach itself, he looked like a boy not yet out of his teens. And now the old woman was with us; my presence had not penetrated to her, evidently:

"Come now, come home, you mustn't . . . That's the last thing, you're not that far yet, you can't go back yet . . ." Half peremptorily, half soothingly, she put her arm round his shoulders. But again he turned to me:

"You could have saved him, you're too late, why didn't you carry on longer, why . . . ?"

Hungering, full of reproach, his eyes looked at me, his hands clasped as if to pray to me, or simply to give me strength, even though it did seem too late for anything . . .

What could I answer? I felt there was nothing out of the ordinary in what he said. I *was* too late, I knew. Once again I thought of the stone face; the transition had taken place too rapidly for me to be able to banish him from my thoughts already. And in a flash the young man's question echoed on in my mind in another form: why had I not continued to shine my torch on him longer, why had I let my attention be diverted? And—especially since the memory of that deathbed of thirteen years before loomed up again, more ominously than a short while ago—I felt only too keenly the extent of my failure, now, and earlier as well. For I realized for the first time why my father had become young again during his death agony. It had been in order to spare *me*, in order not to load on my shoulders the burden which everyone has to carry who feels guilty and tormented by remorse when he sees his father die, even if there has never really been anything to justify such feelings. Everything had taken place imperceptibly and soothingly through the alteration in my father's outward appearance, through the support given by that singularly rejuvenated face, although he was really older than one can ever become in this life. But across the gulf of time that

other, real deathbed, of which he had not deemed me worthy, had gone along with me, suddenly to manifest itself poignantly to me now, as poignantly as a reproach, more poignantly than self-reproach, and nevertheless akin to self-reproach. For I could have checked it, just as I had done with the stone face! I could have made him live on, even if it had been for but five seconds longer; and, who knows, if I had done that, Death might have retreated in discouragement, scared off by that short-lived resistance. No . . . no, it had *not* been in order to spare me: it had been a chance which he had given me, and which I had not known how to use. It had not been for me that he had made himself young, but for his own sake—with my help, for which he had hoped! Who knows the fluctuations of the heart-beat, the vitality of dying brains? I should have spoken to him, not stood idle with my hand on my chin and thoughts of a tiresome funeral in my head. I should have responded to that strange rejuvenation, laughing, stimulating, and bringing to bear all our joint self-confidence. I should have drawn his attention to old portraits, to memories which are eternal, to a childhood which constantly returns, to the enormous vital force which transcends all that and death too . . . The reality of that staring boy's face brought me to myself again. A question pushed itself to the fore, gained power over me, I had to utter it. I went a step closer to him, so that we stood looking into each other's eyes.

"Is it your father who's died?" I asked gently.

He backed away; no reply came from his lips.

Now he was leaning sideways, against the woman, who could have been nurse or mother, and who had held her arms outstretched as if to receive him. His face fascinated me like a mirror. What was the meaning of that strange smile? I no longer expected an answer. Behind them I saw the hard white garden recede far back into the distance, grow blurred, fade away . . . It was as if the young man's face came very close to mine—still closer . . . But how long did that last? . . . Years? . . . How dark it was now. As dark as if nothing had happened and nothing would ever happen. Could I still hear footsteps? The light had gone out all too suddenly, and the night wind had taken possession of me again so irresistibly with its whisperings that I was not able to make out whether the young man walked

back along the gravel drive to the house or disappeared in another way. Blinded as I was by that swift transition from light to darkness, dazed by nameless emotions, it was only after some minutes that I felt in a condition to take a step forward, like a convalescent putting his feet to the ground for the first time. I did not look for the stone face. I knew I should not be able to make contact with him any more, nor he with me. I wandered round until morning in that inhospitable landscape, whose like is not to be found on any map. Poplar trees whispered at my side, interminable board fences fled distractedly away from me, bent round, seemed about to return to the same point; constellations of stars twinkled which I did not recognize. Never have I seen that house since, nor have I ever known what, of all that, can have been true—whether a father actually did die there that night.

Self-Portrait

(Rembrandt)

SIMON VESTDIJK

Translated by James Brockway

Beware of this grimace: this is no more
The gaze we knew, the immortal touch has gone.
This is the smile of scorn we humans wear
When, after the last defeat, life blunders on.

No more the blossoming by which the men
Of the Golden Pleasure Garden set such store.
No more the frolics in the summer sun,
The lovely girls, themselves about to flower.

Triumph of toothless jaws—the greybeards bite
More fiercely than the teeth of upstart youth.
They bite with their wrinkles, deep with their eyes they bite,
Eyes that, remote, from afar, reproach the young
For having fled with the winds of Spring,
And smile no more at life's Satanic joke.

The Swamp

A. ALBERTS

Translated by Alex Brotherton

IT WAS around midday when I got to the village but then I learnt that Naman had gone to live ten kilometres further on. Across the swamp, they said.

"How do I get through the swamp?" I asked.

Oh, there were two paths, a low path and a high one. The high path was a detour.

"A detour?" I asked, puzzled.

"The low path is under water at high tide," one of the villagers explained.

"Is it low tide now?" I asked. The tide was going out. If I waited an hour, the water would be low enough. I pictured a narrow, slippery track over a maze of tree roots. Roots like snakes.

"How much further is it by the high path?" I asked.

"An hour," the same villagers said slowly.

An extra hour's walk. I'd walked far enough already. Why the hell had Naman gone to live on the other side of the swamp?

"Why doesn't mijnheer Naman live in the village any more?" I asked.

"Mijnheer had built a new house on the other side of the swamp," the spokesman answered.

"But why did he pick the other side of the swamp?" I asked.

The villagers said nothing. Even the spokesman was silent. Finally, one of them said lamely: "Mijnheer Naman wanted a house on the other side of the swamp."

"Is it a fine house?" I asked, hastily. Oh, yes, it was a fine house. It was a very fine house. A lot of the villagers had worked hard bringing all the timber across the swamp.

"I'd like something to eat," I said. They took me to a house that turned out to be the house of the spokesman. Three hours later we were on our way. I should have left sooner, but it was only when

I sat down to the food that I suddenly felt how tired I was from a whole morning's walking.

"This is the lower path," I said. My host, who had offered to be my guide, nodded. The path was broad and nothing like the sodden track I had imagined.

"It's used often, this path," I said to my guide. When mijnheer Naman's house was being built all the timber was carried along this path.

"When was the house finished?" I asked. The last lot of timber had been brought a month ago.

We had been walking for an hour and the path was still dry. It didn't look as if it was under water every day. There wasn't much of the swamp to be seen. Only smelt. A suffocating stench of stagnant water and rooting vegetation.

"How far up does the water come at high tide?" I asked.

"Oh, it doesn't come up to here," my guide said.

I didn't say anything. I realized that we were on the high path. I had waited too long and, of course, it was too late to go by the lower path. Finally we came to a turn and my guide stopped.

"If you wish," he said, "we can go off the path here. It's a little wet, but not so bad, and it's much shorter."

I said I didn't mind, and before long we were sinking up to our ankles in water. In water that we couldn't see. It was invisible beneath the grey bushes with pale green leaves on either side of us and the tangled mass of plants under our feet. My guide walked ahead with long sure strides and I followed him as well as I could. I did as he did, lifting my knees high so as not to trip over the roots I could feel under my feet at every step.

After another half hour I found myself before a cleared stretch of solid ground and at the end of the clearing stood a house. A big house, gleaming white in the afternoon sun, with a roofed terrace in the front. It was a wonderful sight after all that grey undergrowth of the swamp. Naman was certainly a remarkable fellow. We made for the house. I paid my guide and thanked him and stumbled over to the terrace. I was dog tired and caked in mud up to my knees. I sat down in one of the easy chairs that were there. Naman would come out in a minute and give me a drink. He was always a con-

siderate host. But I didn't hear a sound. I shouted: "Hullo, there." But no one came.

My guide had gone round to the back of the house and now he came to take leave of me. He wanted to be home before dark.

"This time by the lower path," I said, with a laugh. My guide laughed too.

"Was mijnheer Naman at the back?" I asked.

"Mijnheer Naman won't be long," my guide said. He said goodbye again and went off. I watched him until he disappeared in the undergrowth of the swamp. Then I heard voices behind me in the house. I could pick out Naman's voice.

He had always had a rather chilly, almost authoritarian manner of speaking. Naman put on airs, Naman is a climber, the others in the Service used to say. But I knew that he wasn't. Naman was well-meaning and honest and, in his own way, even good company. But his considerateness was of a special sort. His considerateness was a fetish for him. Naman had one single ambition. He wanted to be the very personification of considerateness and politeness. At one of the towns where he had lived for a year or so they had nicknamed him "the chair-fetcher" and "the walking cigarette lighter." This had given him a bad reputation amongst the husbands, but altogether without justification. It wasn't with any thought of seeking favor that Naman was so considerate. The means was not for him a means, but an end in itself.

There had been a girl too. Rie Winters. Naman had always referred to her as Maria Winters. To her he had been even more than usually attentive. At a rather drunken party, a month or so after Naman had been transferred to another district, she told us, giggling hysterically, what had happened. She expected some love-play, she explained, but Naman handed her cigarettes and Naman lit her cigarettes and Naman fetched drinks and he asked if she felt cold. "When I said yes," she wailed, "off he went and got my coat!" We all roared with laughter, and the tale of all this considerate attentiveness of Naman's started off a really wild evening.

I heard footsteps behind me and I turned around. Naman stood in the open door of the house, a double-barreled hunting-rifle slung under his right arm.

"Look who's here," Naman said.

"Hullo, Naman," I said, and stood up and walked towards him.

"I thought I'd drop in to see you."

"A good idea," Naman said, "an excellent idea." That was typically Naman, the condescendingly courteous Naman, who always tried to put his guests at their ease. We shook hands. Naman had put his gun against the wall and called out to his servant to bring some beer. The beer was enjoyably cold. That was just like Naman. There wasn't a bit of ice in this forsaken spot, but Naman managed to have chilled beer. I was glad I had come.

"Naman," I said, "why did you come over the swamp to live? Or is there another village behind the house?"

"Behind the house," Naman asked, surprised, almost horrified. "A village behind the house? Whatever gave you that idea? Behind the house there's the swamp and on each side there is the swamp. This is a little island in the swamp. Interesting, what?"

"Yes," I said, "it is." Naman's politeness was somehow infectious, at least if you were alone with him. He elevated you, as it were, to his own level of considerate courtesy. If there had been two of us visiting him we would have jeered at his madness in going to live on a little island in the middle of a stinking swamp. But I was alone and so I said: "Yes," and added: "It must give you a feeling of, what would you say, magnificent solitude."

"Yes, that's quite true," Naman said.

That was the way to talk with Naman, if you were alone with him.

"There's a sort of ridge through the swamp that's never under water," Naman said, "except with the spring tides."

"That must be the path I came by," I said.

"Yes, it would be," Naman said.

"Why did you come and live here, Naman?" I asked.

It was a stupid question just after I had talked about magnificent solitude, but Naman replied. He always replied if you asked a question.

"There was no one there in the village," Naman said, "I mean there was no one you could talk to."

"Yes," I said.

There was no one in the village to talk to and so Naman went to live on an island in a swamp where he saw no one at all. Maybe that wasn't such a crazy idea. Maybe it was better to be completely alone than to live in a village where there was no one to talk to.

"It certainly looks like a nice house," I said.

Naman stood up ready to show me around.

It was anything but a nice house. It had seemed pleasant enough when I first saw it, but inside it was hideous. Just three long rooms, each running the whole width of the house, the one behind the other. The walls were painted red, and our footsteps made a hollow sound on the wooden flooring.

"The rooms are perhaps a little too dark," I said. "A lighter color might have been better, but it's restful for the eyes the way it is."

Naman gave an embarrassed laugh. "To tell the truth," he said, "there wasn't any other paint. I don't mind if you say it's ugly. I think it's a rotten color myself."

We went outside and sat down. Naman handed me another bottle of beer. The soft splash of the beer running into the glasses was the only sound that broke the evening silence. The sun had gone down. The sun had sunk out of sight behind the edge of the swamp.

"Next time I'll bring you some paint," I said.

"That would be really very good of you," Naman said.

He stood up and began to walk up and down along the veranda. Each time his back was towards me I saw that he would nod his head quickly once or twice. Once I thought I heard him mumble something.

"Naman, what sort of lighting have you got?" I asked.

"What's that?" he asked, confused. He was walking away from me at that moment and I had apparently disturbed him just as he was nodding again.

"But it isn't dark yet," he said. "It isn't at all that dark yet," he repeated a little more loudly.

"No, no, of course not," I said, "it's not that dark yet."

"Kerosene lamps," Naman said. "You'd like a nip of jenever, eh? Haha, of course you'd like a nip, if you start talking about it, getting dark like that." He stopped walking back and forward. He

came and stood beside my chair.

"Candles too," he said. "But only kerosene lamps out here on the veranda. It's too windy for candles."

There was, in fact, a bit of a breeze blowing. With it came the stink of the swamp. The choking stench I had smelt all the afternoon, when I walked on the trek from the village, rolled like a wave over the house.

"It's getting dark now," Naman said. "It always gets dark so damn quickly here. Why didn't you come a bit earlier?" He ran his hand a couple of times through his hair. "I'll go and get a bottle," he said.

He went inside and shut the door after him. I heard footsteps in the front room and a door slammed shut. Then there was silence.

Naman didn't come back. A little later Naman's servant came with a lamp, a bottle of jenever and two glasses. I asked him where Naman was. Mijnheer Naman was getting dressed.

I asked him if there were many visitors. No, there were never any visitors. It was too far and too difficult to get through the swamp.

I asked him if the swamp always stunk. Only at night when the sun had gone. In the morning the air was fresh again.

"Where are you, Naman?" I called out. No answer. "I've opened the bottle," I shouted. Still no answer. It was now completely dark and there wasn't a sound, not even in the house. Was it this deathly silence that made me tiptoe when I went to the door and opened it a little and peeped in to see what Naman was doing?

Naman stood inside the room facing the further wall. The door was at the corner of the room so I could see him side-on. He stood there shaking his head, slowly at first, then more emphatically. He was mumbling: "No, no." He turned round in my direction. I stepped backwards and looked away from the door as if I was staring into the hazy darkness of the swamp. I heard Naman laughing. I was thinking Naman might open the door noiselessly and come and stand right behind me. I turned around but there was no one there. I went back to the table and poured out another drink for myself. I heard Naman call out to his servant at the back of the house. Then a woman came round to the veranda carrying a crystal decanter on a tray. She put the decanter on the table and poured

the jenever into it from the bottle. I asked her if she was the wife of Naman's servant. She said she was. She must have thought I wanted to know where her husband was, and she said he had gone to pick flowers for mijnheer Naman.

"Do any flowers grow here?" I asked.

Yes, there were some flowers that grew between the roots of the trees in the swamp.

I raised the decanter up to the light. It flickered in the yellow rays of the kerosene lamp. A flower in the swamp. I heard someone moving round inside the house, but Naman still didn't come out. I went back to the door and peeped into the room. Naman wasn't there, and I didn't hear him talking or laughing. When I turned round I saw someone standing beside the table. It was Naman's servant with a second decanter.

"Did you find the flowers?" I asked. Yes, he had found the flowers.

"Where is mijnheer Naman?" I asked. Mijnheer Naman was getting dressed.

I opened the second decanter and sniffed. "Sherry," I said. I half-filled my glass and took a sip. It was sherry.

"Does mijnheer Naman drink sherry these days?" I asked. But the servant had disappeared.

"Everyone disappears here," I said. I called out: "Naman, the sherry's getting warm!" There was no answer. I waited, and took some more of the jenever. After a while I shouted: "Naman, if you don't come soon there won't be any left. Maybe I've finished it already," I said to myself. I lifted the decanter of jenever up to the light. As I looked I saw something black behind the lamp. When I put the decanter down I saw it was Naman. Naman in dinner-jacket, a gleaming white shirt, a black tie, and a red flower in his buttonhole. He stood by the table and poured himself a glass of sherry that he drank in one gulp. I looked at him, thinking it's not so strange after all that a girl would fall for him. He certainly cut a fine figure. "Naman," I said, "you won't mind if I just stay as I am," and I pointed to my trousers still caked with grey mud.

Naman looked at me with a contemptuous smile and said abruptly: "Of course I mind."

He picked up the decanter of sherry and walked inside. I decided to take another nip of jenever and then follow him inside. "Naman," I called out, "are we going to have something to eat now?" No answer. I finished my drink and went inside. There was no one in the front room. I opened the door of the second room.

In the middle of the room there was a table with a white cloth and lighted candles. A vase of red flowers stood in the middle, and there were sparkling glasses and a bottle of wine. Naman was sitting down and I saw that the table was laid for three. I sat in one of the empty chairs and I heard Naman saying almost in a whisper: "Don't pay much attention to him, Maria, he's a little drunk."

The servant brought us soup. "Hah, soup," I said, and I began eating. When I had finished I saw that Naman was sitting with his plate still half full. He was talking, his head turned to the third chair. I heard him ask: "Isn't it too warm for you, Maria, with all the windows closed?"

I saw there wasn't any soup in Maria's plate. "You can hardly breathe here, Naman," I said. He waved his hand, gesturing me to keep quiet, but a few moments later he got up and opened the windows.

When the soup plates had been taken away, Naman poured the wine. The always considerate, attentive Naman, I was thinking. First a dash in his own glass, then a glass for Maria, and then he filled his own. Without looking in my direction he passed me the bottle.

The soup was good and the wine was good, but the rest of the meal was like nothing on earth. The meat was tasteless, and the vegetables were a mess, and it was just as well there were no potatoes because these would even have been worse. I noticed there was no food put at the third place, only wine. "Maria doesn't eat very much," I said.

"I forbid you to say anything about Maria," Naman yelled.

"But the wine is really good," I said quickly, and I filled my glass again.

I could see I would be hard put to it to keep up with Naman. He was drinking one glass after the other. As each bottle was empty the servant brought another. There we sat. Naman and I kept on

drinking. Naman made polite conversation with Maria, and I sat listening or not listening. I didn't listen from the moment that I felt horribly depressed.

"Naman, Naman," I said, "listen to me. Listen to me, both of you."

Naman sat turned toward the empty chair, leaning on the tablecloth with his left elbow. He held his glass in his right hand.

"Naman," I shouted at him, "that's dangerous! You shouldn't lean on the tablecloth with your elbow like that. It's dangerous. Maria's doing it too. It's right on top of the swamp. It's right on top of the swamp and you'll just sink down. Look," I said and I pointed to the wine stains, "it's coming through. It's treacherous, the swamp. You're sinking down into it. With your elbows!"

I pushed my chair away from the table. I didn't dare to lean any more on the table. I looked round. I saw a tray in the corner of the room. I went and got it. I walked carefully, lifting my feet high so I wouldn't fall over in the swamp. I put the tray in front of me on the tablecloth. A bottle fell and one of the glasses broke, but I knew I was safe, as I laid my head on my arms on top of the tray. I knew I wouldn't sink into the swamp. When I woke, Naman was sitting next to me staring at the wall opposite him. My throat was so dry I couldn't speak. I got up and went over to the corner where the bottles were. Every bottle was empty. I walked back to the table. There was only Maria's glass, still full. I looked at Naman. He was still staring. I poured half the wine from Maria's glass into Naman's glass. "There you are, Naman," I said, and drank the other half of the wine. Naman looked up and said: "Thanks," and drank.

"What's the time?" I asked. "It's getting cool."

"It must be nearly daybreak," Naman said.

We went outside. The sky was starting to get light. I saw something lying against the wall of the veranda. It was Naman's gun. The barrel was wet from the dew.

"That won't do it any good," I said, and Naman said: "That stupid servant of mine has forgotten to bring it inside again." The mist floated in twisting billows over the open ground in front of the house. Only mist? Or did I see a white figure gliding quickly into the swamp? No, it couldn't have been.

Carolus

ANNA BLAMAN

Translated by Elizabeth Meijer

UNDER THE SINK in the kitchen there was no cupboard as there so often is, but a space, and in that space lay a big tabby tomcat. He was old, at least twelve or thirteen, and there was not much left in him, but when he heard the strange woman come in he rose to his feet, on the alert and wary. "Hello, puss, nice pussy," said the woman. He looked up at her, his jaws would not close any more and he slobbered, but his eyes were still clear as crystal. "Oh, you have got beautiful eyes, sweet pussy," said the woman. She bent down to stroke him, but he timidly slipped away from under her hand and flew outside with unexpected agility. That's handy, the woman thought, when she saw that a flap had been sawed out of the kitchen door, through which he could leave the house without human aid. Now with his back to her he was sitting on the balcony railing in the weak autumn sunshine. You would almost think he was sitting there trying to work out how a perfect stranger had been able to intrude upon his domain. In that case, she thought, I ought to show him that I am to be trusted, that I don't wish him any harm, that I only mean well by him . . . She lingered at the kitchen door, looking away past the cat. The roofs opposite were covered with antennae, and above them the sky was full of inaudible sounds and invisible images which could, as it were, be plucked out of that sky by the antennae and made audible and visible once more. Purely a technical matter, but nevertheless mysterious enough. Every word, every action, she thought, could probably be perceived everywhere at once, if only you had ears to hear and eyes to see with. And it would even be possible to register all thoughts and feelings everywhere at once if only you had the necessary inner antennae with which to intercept them. But, she thought finally, even in love, when you move heaven and earth to understand someone, so much still escapes you, so much . . . Her glaze slid back once more from

the sky and the antennae to the earth which now seemed to be enveloped in a mist. And so it could even escape you that someone really didn't love you any more . . . But then with the back of her hand she wiped away the tears that threatened and said to herself: I'm going to work, that's what I came here for.

She left the kitchen, glanced into the bedroom and bathroom in passing and went into the sitting room. She ought to know this sitting room, for had she not sat here countless times, face to face with the mistress of the house, and talking far into the night? They trusted each other, they even entrusted a great deal to each other in those conversations. And yet it was as if she were entering the room for the first time in her life. Without the person who lived here everything was different; everything was as it really was. So it was not only in love but also in this friendship that almost everything had escaped her . . . all that lay below the surface of her friend's life. Just look at that chair, placed strategically between the fireplace and the bookcase, a barricade against loneliness. And the contents of the bookcase, a testimony to her preference for illustrated books, reproductions and prints, a more concrete way of filling up the emptiness than words, words, words. And look at those photos of her on the wall—a young girl in a family group—the only photos she owned. And look at all the cigarettes on the table, numerous packs of cigarettes and a lighter which always worked. My God, you're lonely! I wonder, now that you yourself are not here, and your absence enables me to spy on your innermost secrets, as it were, whether I ever really reached you. I feel depressed now because my love is no longer returned, I feel abandoned and outcast, I even feel as if everything of value that I had to offer is being wantonly rejected . . . but all that was for my love alone, and then only on condition that he reciprocate fully. No, I don't suppose my dear friend ever received much encouragement to stick out her feelers in my direction . . . I don't suppose she ever received any signals from me. But when all is said and done, what else can one do except try and better one's behavior? To begin with, she would spend the week she was going to have in this house as usefully as possible; not brooding but working, and remembering to write a note to her hostess's vacation address at least every other day. For instance, today she could

write: when I came in that dear old cat (what a nuisance not to know whether the animal had a name . . . or rather, what its name was, for of course it had one) was sitting under the sink—I guess that is his favorite spot—and he looked at me as if to ask, “What are you doing here” . . . After she had written such a note, she took out her books and papers and began to work, just as she had planned, concentrating stubbornly for hours on end . . .

The cat had taken up its position under the sink again, lain down and gone to sleep. But of course it woke up as soon as the strange woman in the sitting room pushed back her chair and stood up. Once more she went into the kitchen, once more she looked under the sink. Without uncurling himself, he peered up at her through half-closed eyes. She no longer tried to stroke him, but said, “Come on, slobberer, I’ll give you some milk.” She thought, it’s a pathetic creature, pathetic and a bit repulsive. And then she said in a childish singsong voice, “Milky, milky,” and took a few steps back to watch the cat rise to its feet, sniff long and fastidiously at the milk and eventually begin to lap it up. She thought, and he’s ugly too, with that awful old mouth and unwieldy old body . . . it’s only his eyes that are beautiful. But after the milk was finished, she went up to him again and gently laid her hand on his fur. He let her do it. “Nice pussy,” she said caressingly, and she stroked him. He remained tense and in no way returned her attention. No, he did not trust her yet, his fur felt harsh and dry . . .

At dusk she decided to stop working, pulled on her coat and went to have a meal in town. In the restaurant it was too depressing for words. Of course she could not help thinking that it was only a short time ago since they had been together, had eaten together in restaurants and talked together. What they found to talk about together was a mystery, but there was always something to tell each other. Together life had seemed so eventful, and as soon as you were alone nothing happened, absolutely nothing . . .

When she entered the house again, she went straight to the bedroom. She took two sleeping pills and got into bed. But they did not work immediately. For a long time she lay wide awake and dog-tired, staring at the reflections on the walls and ceiling and listening to the unfamiliar sounds in the strange, sleeping house.

And of course she thought of the countless times they had slept together in strange rooms, hotel rooms, and wherever they had been together they had been at home . . . And so she had at last reached that state between sleeping and waking when she was startled by a noise like a door closing or a chair being moved. She knew immediately that it was the cat. But nevertheless she turned on the light and went to the kitchen. She also turned on the light there. The animal had jumped onto the kitchen table and was sitting there; it looked at her with golden eyes but without warmth. "Puss," she said and then she laid her hand on his fur and stroked him just as she had done early in the evening. He not only permitted it but he even rose and moved under her stroking hand towards her caresses. "Ah," she said softly, "are you beginning to like me?" It even seemed as if his fur had become a little smoother and shinier. She cautiously tickled him under the chin and he did not object to that either. "Let's see," she said then, and she suddenly pushed his head back to look into his eyes, avoiding his mouth which disgusted her. Let's see! The golden eyes flashed at her for an instant; they were the eyes of an animal, beautiful but cold, and without comprehension. Before she had become conscious of this the cat had flinched back timidly. He leapt from the table and disappeared outside, into the night . . .

The next day she worked all the morning and all the afternoon. She had made up her mind to regard her grief as a disease, for instance as a heart disease or a kidney disease which you can learn to live with, without letting it prevent you from behaving normally and even cheerfully. And so at midday she had put down a bowl of fish and rice for the cat, talking cheerfully, but not smiling, for revealing your teeth in a smile, so she had heard, gives animals the impression of a hostile leer. In the evening she took only one sleeping pill instead of two, and the next day and the day after that also. So she was making progress. And the following night she even dreamed of something that had nothing to do with her grief. She was so surprised that it woke her up, and she switched on the bedside light to see what time it was. And as people do who return from the dream world of sleep to the world of reality, she first looked around warily to see if everything was still the same; commonplace,

tangible and without mystery. And then on the chair facing her bed she saw the cat. It did not move her in any way, she only saw it, no more, and she looked while feeling for her watch on the bedside table. It was four o'clock. Four o'clock! She was no longer at all sleepy and thought, now I'll start worrying, I've been rather brave the last three days, but now I'll start worrying. She sat up with a jerk to pick up the sleeping pills. The cat had been awake all the time but did not uncurl himself. He watched with half closed eyes, eyes without comprehension, eyes only watching her from motives of self-preservation. But at that moment she was not paying any attention to him. Violently she shook all the pills in the tube into her hand and sat looking at them, playing with thoughts of a suicide she would never commit. And yet, what a lot she would be spared if she did. When her sorrow was past and when she no longer needed to treat it as a disease, a void far more terrible than death awaited her, a terrible emptiness without love, and even without sorrow (but what had she just dreamed, she no longer knew), a terrible emptiness in which the gestures and language of love would die a miserable death because there was no beloved. "Oh my love!" Sobbing and moaning, she sat staring at the white pills in her hand without realizing that the cat had got up in the meantime and stood facing her, dreamy yet on the alert. "O my love," she moaned, and at that moment she saw neither the cat nor the pills, and even her love was not present in her mind's eye. She saw only herself, a woman who had expected everything and was left with nothing, a woman who would have to go on alone to the end, alone in the world, alone in bed . . . No, she could not just lie awake; she slid all the pills but two back into the tube, pushed aside the blankets and brushed past the cat on her way to the bathroom for a glass of water. It left him quite unmoved, he only drew back his forepaws slightly. In the bathroom she swallowed the pills and then looked in the mirror. What a face! Worrying will make you old and ugly. And then to keep going just the same, just the same, as if nothing had happened, with a laugh now and then, just as if you did not know what was happening to that face. She leaned over towards the mirror. If you looked closely you could see quite clearly where the creases and lines would form as a result of that false behavior

and false zest for living. And then a sorrow rose in her, an angry sorrow like a storm trying to break, but she controlled herself. She went back to bed quite calmly and also pulled the blankets up quite calmly. And perhaps nothing would have happened, perhaps the whole stay in that house would have gone off without incident if that animal had not jumped on her bed then. It came towards her, stepping heavily over her body, and stopping just in front of her face, its slobbering mouth less than six inches away from her, and its golden eyes blind and incomprehending like two marbles against which human despair irrevocably rebounded . . . all human despair, except that of those pathetically lonely creatures who did not know whether a human voice, a human mouth, arms, embracing, protective arms, words, endearments or only your name . . . The storm broke. A woman awoke in her, a Fury, raving mad. "Get out! Get the hell out of here!" She knocked the animal off the bed, threw back the blankets savagely, and trembling with rage hunted it out of the room, get out, get out! Cursing and trembling with rage, she hunted it out of the house, that beast with its slobbering mouth and frozen stare, its sagging belly full of entrails and filth, its emasculate sensuality, that sensuality to which old maids were susceptible, old maids like the one that lived here and like the one staying here who was going mad with rage! . . . No, that rage had already passed. She walked, she staggered back to the bedroom, crawled into bed and lay there deflated and exhausted, her muscles and nerves quivering with the prostrating dismay of one who has done something irremediable and is now irrevocably lost . . .

For two days she waited and searched. She visited all the neighbors and asked them to look in all the gardens, but to no avail. Work was impossible, she could only brood about the explanation she would give. The same explanation she gave to the neighbors: he simply refuses to come in now that his mistress is not at home . . . But if you should by any chance see him . . .

The next day was the day her hospitable friend was to return. She had just finished arranging some welcome-home flowers in vases when she heard the bell and at the same time a key turning in the lock. There she was. "Well, and how have you been getting on here?" She felt the lines and creases of false sincerity and false

zest for living forming in her face. "Wonderful," was the answer, "I've been able to get on with my work splendidly." "And Carolus? How's he been?" Of course, Carolus was his name, how could she have forgotten it? "Carolus," she said, and the creases and lines grew sharper, "Oh, fine! But he's obviously been missing his mistress, he just refuses to come in . . . at least, when he sees me." Her hostess stood up and went onto the balcony. And there she leaned over the railing and looked down, left and right. "Carolus!" she called, "Carolus!" Behind her stood her guest, waiting motionless, with a vain hope in her heart. The cat did not come. "Perhaps he'll come later," her hostess said and turned her back towards her. "Oh, he's sure to," was her answer, and that moment was decisive. She felt as if the lines and creases were being carved into her face.

It All Begins . . .

M. VASALIS

Translated by James Brockway

It all begins to change again,
again I find enchantment in
the frailest things, that fade and leave no trace.
Once more these seem the only things that live
and all the rest, the solid, matter-of-fact, merely décor,
bedrock above which life, the river, flows.
A golden hair,
 faltering on a dark-blue sleeve,
a hieroglyph.
Bird's feet printed in the snow,
an undertone of laughter in a voice . . .
Strange, that life should return like this:
back
to front: in shadows, echoes, faintest track.

All Our Yesterdays

BEB VUYK

Translated by Estelle Debrot

DURING THAT MONTH it rained every day, but before evening fell it was dry again. Then the damp garden smelled of leaves and grass. The hospital was a rebuilt country house, surrounded by a park-like garden, where a famous painter had lived a hundred years ago in royal splendor. In spite of all the changes made by the scores of alterations for different purposes, it had retained much of the old in its sphere, a composure which is not of today and a naïve rusticity. It lay just outside the centrum on a busy highway, an enclave of rest in the town and in time.

Groves were cleared away and ponds were filled up, but the old driveway of royal palms had been spared, was asphalted, and led from the modern entrance building to the nurses' quarters, the former main building, bombastically ugly and yet with a gesture of grandeur. Though small courts had been formed by additions to the side wings, adequate lawns remained, partly overshadowed by trees, to preserve a feeling of space, of coolness and rusticity. Deer grazed there in the afternoons under tall trees.

She always lay alone in this white room. During the day the shutters remained closed, to open an hour before sundown, when the light had lost its glare and a grey shadow rose on the white of the walls, not cast and not directed, as if coming from inside. There are places where temporary things become lasting. From the tandem, through the dark tunnel of unconsciousness, she had been flung in this place, no longer in life and not yet in death. At night the door to the wide rear gallery stood open. From the dark room she could see into the gallery where some twenty meters from her bed, in the middle, a low-hanging lamp spread a soft yellow circle over the table of the night nurses.

One night she had dreamed aloud, but when she wakened she could not remember what the dream was about. The night nurse

was standing over her bed offering her something to drink.

"Are you afraid?" she asked. "There is no reason to be, everything is going to be all right. You have only to lie flat in the dark a few weeks longer."

"No, no, I am not afraid," she said hastily and was surprised about the feeling of guilt that she recognized from her youth, when she had fibbed without being caught.

"Shall I give you something to make you sleep?"

"Oh, no," she answered almost offended and closed her eyes. "Thank you just the same, I'll fall asleep again."

But she did not go to sleep again. The nurse finished her rounds and sat down at the table under the lamp. She knitted for a while, went to help one of the patients in another room, and then put her knitting away and took up a newspaper.

The yellow light from a low-hanging lamp, under it a policeman sat reading the newspaper. She lay on a mat on the dirty floor and dreamed, screaming in the dream. She was sentenced and the judge was the Kempaitai captain with the pale face and the immobile eyes of a reptile. She told her story with Ann and Chris sitting next to her, they knew her lies and would bear her out.

Then Bennie was brought in. He did not wear a uniform any longer, but the old khaki shirt and trousers which he always had on when he went in the gardens. He looked calm and unsuspecting and greeted the judge unconstrainedly with a nod of his head. She had not been able to warn him, he was not taken prisoner together with them and had never been confronted with them. Now they had taken him from the prison camp and brought him here to testify.

She thought with dismay, he does not know the story I made up, he will betray us. His evidence will show that we are lying.

His face came nearer like a close-up in a film, a friendly, trustworthy face, the face of an honest and simple person. In his guilelessness he will betray us, she thought, he will tell the truth and his truth will be our death.

Then she saw his face begin to decay. The eyes sank deeper, the cheeks fell away, the teeth became bare. The image fell back-

wards, she saw him from feet to head. His shirt was open, she could see his chest and how the flesh was already rotting, that the ribs were visible, that only a few shreds of dark flesh hung between the bars of the thorax.

She screamed, she heard herself screaming.

Someone touched her hand and said: "Are you afraid, do you want something to drink?"

The little policeman gave her the glass of water with trembling hands. Two others stood behind him.

"You frightened us," he said. "Were you dreaming?"

"Yes, about the Kempaitai."

She could see their faces, she nodded to both and repeated: "About the Kempaitai."

"Did they torture you?" asked the tallest one.

"Yes, with electricity, but it was not about that."

"You must not frighten us," said the small one earnestly.

She sat up straight on her mat and looked in their faces and recognized their fear. One of them squatted down next to her, took a little box from his pocket and rubbed some salve on her forehead.

"What is it?" she asked.

"*Obat matjan*." The other offered some aspirin and got more water.

"Go to sleep again," said the tall one and added comfortingly as to a child, "tomorrow you will not be interrogated."

She lay down again and closed her eyes. Then they spoke Javanese to one another; a little later she heard the door close. When she looked up again the little policeman sat at the table under the low lamp—like a nurse who is watching a patient, she had thought then.

She was taken to the Roentgen room for an examination on a stretcher that was wheeled along the gallery. It was still early, but the light there outside her room was already unmercifully dazzling. Babus were mopping the long tiled gallery; nurses were moving swiftly from one section to the other; convalescing patients, their faces still sunken from illness, were walking with care in the garden. She closed her eyes and covered her face with her hands.

"That is better," said the nurse, "the light is too sharp for you."

She always made remarks that were intended to be friendly and were correct but which, for some reason or other, were not suited to the situation. After this trip the Roentgen room was dim, cool and mercifully quiet. They left her lying on the stretcher because the doctor had not yet arrived. She kept her eyes closed, especially when they gave her the injection, and she remained for a time in a state between the border of consciousness and moments of unconsciousness. Afterwards the things around her became clearer again, though farther away and slightly shifted. The doctor stood next to her, before she was aware that he had come in.

"She has already had the shot," she heard the nurse saying, "but we did not know if we should shave off her hair or not."

He laid his hand on her neck. His fingers were as cold as the blade of a sword. Deathly cold like a sword, she thought. There was one word that expressed it exactly, but she could no longer remember it.

Now there was nothing left but to die with dignity. This was the last command, die with dignity. At the same time she knew that she did not have to die, not at this moment in any case. The strain of fear was insupportable, though she knew with certainty that she was not going to die. More direct and more urgent than the fear of death was the fear to be lacking in dignity, to go to pieces, deteriorate under the torture, to shrink from the pain, to give in to a complaint, to beg with indignity.

They had not closed her up in a cell, but in the *gudang* where the confiscated goods were kept. One evening a woman in one of the cells began to scream. She hardly knew her, only that she was the wife of the former mayor. On the way to the water closet, she had to pass the woman's cell, in the beginning a policeman always walked in back of her, later not, at least if there were no Japanese. Sometimes they exchanged a few words. The woman always stood in back of the observation hole, a white face, framed by tangled reddish hair that was completely shaved away on one side of her head. "They did that right away at the first interrogation," the woman had whispered to her. In the afternoon the woman's niece

came to bring her food, the prisoners who were pending trial were allowed to receive their food from outside. Sometimes her little son came along, a cute, fat little fellow of about four. One afternoon Pak Ateng, the oldest policeman, opened the cell door, the woman came out and opened her arms and the little boy ran to her.

She had seen it all from the window in the *gudang* and she had thought of her own children.

"Who will take care of your little boys when we have beheaded you?" the Japanese captain had inquired a couple of days ago.

It was nearly dark when she heard the screaming and she knew at once who it was. She had looked out of the window without seeing anything, her body rigid with the effort not to scream too. The inspector carried the woman out of the cell and laid her on a camp bed in the *gudang* and gave her a bromide. Then she wasn't screaming any more, but lay cramped, sobbing out loud. Later a doctor came with a Japanese lieutenant and they took her to the hospital. She was calm by then. She had sat on a bench and combed the long part of her hair over the shaved skull.

"Whoever is accused of a capital crime gets his head shaven," the woman had said, "but they cannot prove anything on me. I took the radio to pieces and threw the broken parts in the river. Every afternoon I walked past the river with my little boy."

"You are sentenced to death," screamed the Japanese captain at her.

He threw the revolver on the table and pulled out his sword.

"The way you would like to be executed you may choose yourself, revolver or sword." And when she did not answer, she was more surprised than afraid at that moment, he had pulled her hair up in back and laid the blade of his sword on her neck. She felt the ice-cold of its thin edge penetrate her body.

"Then the coldness of death penetrated his body." It was a line from a poem, but she no longer knew of whom. It is not true, she thought, he is acting, that belongs to the nerve treatment. Nothing is going to happen!

She was not afraid and could think clearly. It was the coldness of the metal that penetrated to her spine and was reverberated from there that made her tremble. He brushed the sword upwards along

the back of her head and then pulled it away, holding it loosely in his hand.

"She has not been shaven yet," he said to the lieutenant. "I cannot cut off her head like that. Tomorrow. Then I'll call for her and take her to Bogor. It is really too difficult here—in Bogor we have all the necessary arrangements for it."

He won't come, she had thought. This is a case in the stage of inquiry, no judgment has been pronounced. But he did come, in a light-yellow, open car with red upholstery inside that smelled like new leather. She had to sit next to him. He himself drove. They rode in the direction of Bogor. Acting, she thought, acting. She was not trembling any longer, but sat straight up, her body rigid, with a fixed smile. After ten minutes he turned into a side street, then she knew that they were going back.

He stopped near the guard.

"I'll give you one more chance tomorrow. We will interrogate you and then you must tell the truth."

She stood next to the car and he put out his arm and laid his fingers between two cervical vertebrae. "Watch out, here is where the cut comes," he had said.

The sun was shining, it was a warm day, but his fingers were as cold as his sword.

The doctor took his hand away. "We do not have to shave her hair for this roentgen photo," he said. "Is everything ready, nurse? We will make the puncture first."

They had put her in a sitting position on the table. She had not sat up for days and it made her dizzy and still more unsure. The contours of things shifted, but the voices remained clear and close. She felt his fingers between the vertebrae, but lower, much lower than then.

"Bend further forward," he had commanded and she obeyed.

She heard the needle push the cartilage and it was as if she felt the pain only much later that began to spread from the top of her skull, through thousands of little cells, like water seeping through sinter. She sat still, gripped in an icy rigidity from head to hips. She knew where she was, she knew the doctor and the assistant;

if she had been asked she could have said their names without faltering. She knew what was happening to her and why and yet her reactions were only indirectly determined because of that.

"Don't you feel anything yet?" asked the doctor.

"No," she answered vaguely.

"No," repeated the doctor and it was the surprise in his voice that helped her gather the enormous exertion to bring up an answer against those other forces.

"Yes, now I do." This time she spoke calmly and clearly. The clarity only lasted a moment, for when the pain began to stream through her in full strength, she repeated several times: "It is terrible, terrible." Stammering, not about the pain, but about the indignity of this confession.

The Child We Were

CH. EDGAR DU PERRON

Translated by James Brockway

Life we think sweetest in the past that's dead,
in the furthest field of memory's domain—
the lie of childhood days, the promise vain
of all we were going to do and never did.

Day of tin soldiers, prayers beside the bed,
of mother's goodnight kiss, of perfume blown,
the purest source of happiness and pain,
of wonder, and of friendships never said.

His on our walls is the portrait we love best,
this child, deep in a lap, in broad hands held,
even now in his eye a dark, a strange mistrust:
long vanished self, small solitary child,
for whom such bitter, idle tears we've shed,
between the fading portraits of the dead.

Heron-Dance

H. J. FRIEDERICY

Translated by N. C. Clegg

A FEW HUNDRED YARDS from the shore of a small island in the sea of Flores the *Astra* lay at anchor. When the white moon had risen the captain had turned in, and now I was standing alone at the railing of the narrow little ship that had conveyed me to this silent eternity. In the cool light the sea lay motionless; and the island floated, neither near nor far, aimless, sleepy: a blue-grey silhouette with a vague, pale glimmer of palmtops. The universe stood still, and I myself was barely holding on to life any more. It was a fulfilment, and though I still noticed a faint longing in my heart to set foot on the invisible beach of the island and never return, I did not really want to. I knew that nothing is sweeter than longing.

From the island came the muted utterance of two drums. It was midnight, and so they were free to speak. They divided into four the days that surrounded big events such as birth, marriage and death, and conducted their most tender and passionate exchanges, their deepest and darkest dialogues, when the world was silent. For whether they whispered softly in a feverish, agitated rhythm; whether their voices swelled as they spoke; or whether they were making loud incantation—they were always brothers of the silence.

Across the quiet, gleaming sea came floating the language of the two drums—dull, urgent, throbbing. They held themselves in check like fiery Makassar horses at the start of a journey. Gradually their voices became clearer, their words more distinct. They leapt over the *alang-alang* (sword-grass) like nimble-footed deer, and darted breathlessly away. They danced like the child-dancers at the Gowese Court, serious, cautious, shy, their nervous little fingers clutching a fan. They swaggered like men, striding with out-turned toes, their moustaches twisted, the hilts of their *kris* glittering in the sun, boasting of their heroic exploits. They fought life-and-death battles: bawling their insults, beating their chests, attacking and stabbing the

enemy till the blood came spurting from his wounds. They fell back panting, gasping, satisfied. And they themselves died, too. They grew old and weary, their tired voices dwelling on the past; until they sighed softly, until they expired and fell silent—silent as the sea, the moon, the island, as my own heart.

After a long journey on horseback we came to a Buginese mountain village. Night had fallen when the prince and I, followed by our retinue, dismounted from our weary stallions in the front-yard of the headman's high dark house. The strong familiar smell of leather and horse sweat hung about us. A pale glimmer spread from the East. The moon was rising—full, white and luminous. When we had greeted the old headman, and our horses had been led away, a silence fell. And in this silence I heard far in the distance the voices of the two drums.

I had not been able to resist the power of the *ganrang*s since I had heard the drums of Sailus that one night at sea. And so now, too, I asked the prince if he could send for a couple of good *ganrang* players. The headman said that we were in luck. A company of expert performers of the ancient heron-dance, the *pakondo-buleng*, happened to be staying as guests in the village. They were people from the coast who would normally never visit the mountains. But a girl from Palatjari, the mountain village, had met a young fisherman in the capital of the country and fallen in love with him. And though in former years such a union would never have been countenanced, the wedding would take place in three days time. And at the feast the bridegroom's relations, the famous *pakondo-buleng* of Barombong (the fishing village that was his home) were to dance the heron-dance. The *ganrang* players of this company, perhaps the best in the land, had come along too. Would we like to see the performance?

About an hour later the company came to pay their respects. Wrapped in our blankets, the prince and I were sitting on a mat in front of the headman's house. Before us lay the yard, surrounded by high, motionless palms. Part of it was suffused with white moonlight, part was lit by a big woodfire on which our retinue were roasting venison, chatting busily away.

The leader of the company, who was also their chief drummer, greeted us and then sat down in front of his younger partner on a rattan mat. He was getting on in years; across his wrinkled brow fell a few locks of grey hair which had escaped from the scarf he was wearing, Buginese fashion, tied carelessly round his head. The two *ganrang* players took the oblong wooden drums onto their knees and remained sitting in the same position, heads bowed, the left hand resting against one drumskin, while in the right hand the little curved stick of ebony seemed to be waiting to give the other drumskin the series of cracking beats which starts off each performance. The drums were asleep, their flanks black-brown from the fumes of the offerings made by their masters. They moved as the drummers breathed. In the moonlight their tight-stretched goatskin looked as white as old Chinese pottery. The *ganrang* players were silently waiting.

On our mat the prince moved a little closer and said softly: "I must say I'm amazed that they are going through with this wedding. These fisherfolk always marry exclusively among themselves. The elder *ganrang* player, who is traditionally a man of influence in Barombong, has opposed it tooth and nail, so the village headman tells me. But now he has come along after all."

The cracking beats sounded, and sped away to the hills. The drums had awakened. The old man took the lead, and was followed by the one sitting behind him—probably a son whom he himself had initiated in the sacred *ganrang* play. Their faces were tight-shut, their eyes closed. Only their hands had a passionate life of their own. It was as if they belonged to the drums, as if the strong fingers derived their life from the drums. I could see the left hands best. They tapped with fingers and palm, they frolicked, they caressed shyly, they hammered and pounded. And after the drums had loudly commanded our attention, and had begun to speak more lightly and carelessly, a gentle murmur of excitement ran through the rows of villagers who had formed a wide circle around the drums and ourselves. The heron had come floating in.

The dancer held his arms spread wide like wings. His shoulders were covered by a narrow pale-blue shawl, the tips of which were clutched between the fingers of his outstretched hands. A second

pale-blue shawl completely enveloped his head and was kept in shape by a few bamboo sticks on the inside. Illuminated by moon and fire in turn, it created an amazing illusion of the head of a big bird.

Borne on the voices of the two drums, the heron floated majestically above the green land. All was quiet. An occasional stately wing-beat, an occasional oscillation quickly corrected by a twist of the flight-feathers, and an occasional peering downward for the gleam of a small fish ruffling the smooth surface of the flooded rice fields.

In an undertone the drums spoke of sailing clouds; of dark green, slumbering villages; of brown, scorched mountain slopes. Then suddenly they became uneasy. Something unknown was approaching. Their voices grew louder. They sounded excited, alarmed. Rapidly beating its wings, the heron looked in all directions. It was the huntsman, the lame huntsman for whom the village children in the front row apprehensively shuffled aside. The drums encircled both huntsman and bird with their voices. Bird and huntsman were driven on by the two *ganrangs*. With his leg dragging, all that the huntsman could do was to sneak close, limping along on the dull, compelling beat which sent him to his destination. And all that the heron could do was to escape, to return yet again to the danger, floating down in wide circles, alighting. And the huntsman was not allowed to see the bird. His limp grew worse with his growing fatigue. He had to peer about him with unseeing eyes.

I had watched the performance many times and knew how it would end. The huntsman would finally kill the heron. He would hobble triumphantly to his prey, and discover to his horror that the heron was his own son.

For a moment the drums held their breath. The men by the fire had fallen silent. The moon stood behind the palmtops as if behind a delicate wrought-iron grating. The children, who had laughed at the lame huntsman, now looked anxious. The huntsman had seen the bird, and the bird did not see the huntsman. A cracking beat, like a shot, sounded from one of the drumskins. The heron struggled to rise on its wings. A few despondent wingbeats hardly moved him. The bird's head, lifted high, turned helplessly from left to right; its great beak half open, the breath coming with difficulty. The wings hung limp. A second shot. The unwieldy bird made one last heart-

breaking attempt to rise up. But the drums were almost dumb. They hardly breathed. And the heron, tired, tired, sank down in rest. It stretched itself, shuddered, was dead. The crippled huntsman jumped towards it. He kneeled down by the lifeless bird, bent over the corpse, and burst out in loud lamentation. "It is my son," he wailed. "My son!"

The drums were silent. The performance was over. I was thinking of going inside, for a thin wind had started to sweep across the mountains. As I got up, pulling my blanket around me, I heard the prince ask in a loud voice: "Is he really dead?"

Quickly looking up, I saw a small group of men clumsily lifting the body of the heron-dancer, and almost at once it struck me that while the second *ganrang* player was tying his drum on to his back, the old one remained seated as if turned to stone: his face old as the ages; his eyes closed; the drum on his knees; the thin hands resting exhausted on the flanks of the *ganrang*.

The young dancer was dead. When he was carried on a stretcher to the house of his host, the prince said: "He was the bridegroom."

We climbed the stairs of the headman's house. The moon stood high in the sky. A thought stirred in me. At last I asked: "And the huntsman?"

"Yes," said the prince slowly, "that's his father."

Hijo de Puta

ADRIAAN MORRIËN

Translated by James S Holmes and Hans van Marle

MY MOTHER was one of those prostitutes of the old sort: once a year she had a child whose father remained unknown. All the races of the earth fraternized in the bosom of our family. Even the children who were quite brown and showed all the traits of my mother's and my stepfather's race could lay claim to her parenthood alone with certainty, for my father's countrymen, too, crossed our threshold with dishonorable intentions. Only my big brother, a few years older than I, was in all probability my stepfather's. He had been born in the days when my mother's conjugal fidelity still held the upper hand over poverty. Soon after that she set to earning a bit of extra money, just as other women go out washing or let themselves be pent up in a shed to sort fruit or process tobacco leaves.

My mother liked the open air and the company of men. Every evening after she had finished her work in the household and had got the youngest children to sleep she would set out in her nicest frock, with a flower in her hair and a smile wreathing her mouth, and walk to the harbor where the ships lay at anchor and the foreign sailors came ashore, their bodies tense with desire. Not long after she had left, we would see her coming back with a man on her arm, her white frock standing out in the shadows of the evening, and talking and laughing as though she had known her friend for years. Sometimes when it was raining she would surprise us—that is, my stepfather and the older children who were allowed to be up still—sitting inside the house because it was raining. Then, with the wave of an arm, but not unkindly, she would shoo us outside, while the sailor turned his head away as if shamed at such visible consequences of so rash a deed.

Sitting together on the bench under the tall trees, we could hear mother talking inside with the sailor while the two of them

undressed. She would call him all sorts of endearing names, names that she repeated in the daytime to my father and us children. Her voice was flattering; through the fall of the rain her kisses had a sweet and peaceful sound. Then it grew still, as they lay down to make love. The windows were closed off with a kind of rolling curtains or shutters of bamboo slats that let the light shine through in thin strips. After my mother had finished her work and the man had gone away, she would pull the bamboo curtains up and lean laughing out of the window, her body naked to the waist, although that was hardly visible against the light of the kerosene lamp. That was the sign for us to come in again. She would show us the piece of money she had got, and we children would admire the effigy of a foreign king or queen on the silver of the coin.

While the piece of money was going from hand to hand, my mother would already be busy making her toilet. She was a beautiful woman, in the autumn of her youth, with a full, hard bosom, smooth, well-rounded shoulders, and a mouth that had become extraordinarily agile, no doubt a result of the business of love. Later when I thought of her I often compared her mouth to a hand. It gave the impression of being loose from her face, as if it was always slipping off her teeth. It would catch the words, as though to caress them before letting them loose. With a fresh flower in her hair, my mother would set off down the path once again, while we stayed behind in the odor of the sailor's tobacco and my mother's perfume.

Sometimes when business was good it would grow quite late. Then we would take refuge with each other in the house even when it wasn't raining, and often we'd have to be wakened to go sit on the bench outside again. For the one room in our house, or rather hut, didn't offer a great deal of space. And the delicacy of the client had to be taken into consideration.

Outside, we could feel the cool of the night passing over our sleepy heads. Beyond the rustle of the trees was the drone of the sea. I remember the night sky, with the stars above the treetops. I was amazed that one's gaze could reach so far. While sleep was making my consciousness small and hard, my senses sent long festoons through the tenuous space. My father would sit with two sleeping children on his lap, time after time working a hand free to take his

cigaret out of his mouth. The other children leaned up against him, all contributing something of their warmth. Our breaths formed a thick clump of shrubbery together.

At last my father and mother would carry us inside the house and lay us down beside each other, careful not to disturb our sleep. Sometimes I woke up, and saw my parents having a bite to eat—rice or a piece of cold chicken. They wouldn't talk, but it was as though my mother's mouth was forming words even when she chewed. Afterwards they would lie down on the mat where my mother had lain with the sailors. Through a veil of sleep I could see their bodies moving, as though there was something of a shame that had to be erased. My mother would sigh, or laugh—a last deep-resounding laugh my father had a right to.

Now and then my mother would come home with some young lad, a white ship's boy with new leather shoes and a dagger in his waistband. I would feel just as nervous as he, and in my mind I would take just as big steps and make just as angular gestures. At other times I was never jealous, but now I would feel my heart pounding in envy. Though usually I hardly imagined what happened, in such cases I would think of the warm nakedness of my mother. The mother image would grow vague and detach itself from this woman for whom the desire to please had become a habit. I would watch her let down the bamboo curtains in front of the windows and hear her say: Is your mother at home this kind to you, too? Does she have such nice breasts? And though I had never seen it, I would know she was taking her breasts in her hand and pressing the nipples to the boy's mouth, one after the other, while she caressed his body with her free hand. His white body would yield itself to her brown one as to its negation. He would lose himself in her lap, far from his country and his white family. The butt of his cigaret lay beside the door, still smoking, with the affability of an offering. Otherwise I picked up the butts that sailors threw away before they stooped over and went inside the house, but in this case I would circumvent it in abhorrence. Inside, it had grown silent, a silence that begged me to forget her.

After a while my mother's voice would sound again, and this time also the voice of the boy, who had earned his right to speak.

He would come out of the house with a fresh cigaret in his mouth, his movements lighter, almost free of the stiffness that kept him from talking with us. His warm piece of money would already be going from hand to hand. He's fourteen years old, my mother would say. He has the love of a missionary priest, she'd laugh.

Sometimes she brought home some old man who would stop to look us over and offer my father a cigaret. It would last a long while. He needed a lot of time to undress, and it never grew completely still. I could hear him groaning, as if what he did distressed him. My mother consoled him with the cheeriness of her profession, which cannot go deeply into another's sorrow. If her body could not give happiness she had failed, and was brought face to face with her own despair. At such times everything would serve to cut her off from the caller: the smaller children sleeping in a corner of the room, her husband and the larger ones whose voices she could hear outside as she peered along the client's head toward the ceiling. She was good-natured, and had a great deal of patience with an impotent body twisting above hers and pouring its sweat out over her. She would forget herself, but the man could not forget, attempting to perform by sheer force of mind and will what he had earlier been able to do without thought or effort. Even in the decisive moments there was a gap between enjoyment and awareness. The old man would crown his labors with a long spell of coughing. His fulfilment was a mixture of relief and fatigue. He grew friendly, genial, ordinary. I would have a feeling of sympathy for him, as though we had robbed him. And I could never keep from gazing after such clients as they walked down the path beneath the dark trees, toward the city and the ships. The thing that mattered to them was to prove to themselves that they were still alive. But everything about them spoke of destruction: the heels of their shoes, the patches of sweat on their shirts, the brittle nails, and the skin that hung loosely over the bones of their faces. When I held their pieces of money in my hand, I felt the longing to engross myself in their unknown lives. Even though they took nothing of my mother's that I myself valued, they left a great emptiness behind in me.

My mother washed off the memory of them with the tip of a towel that she dipped in water and rubbed along her armpits, her

thighs, and the entrance to her womb. She would stand with her legs spread apart, big, gleaming, with busy hands whose innocence had changed into mechanicalness. Her full, round breasts would dance up and down as though she wanted to shake them off her. Her smile ran in advance of her thoughts.

My mother was the real head of the family. She had cast off all vestiges of submissiveness, and in everything that happened her sacred work had to be taken into consideration. My father put up a show of resistance now and then, and sometimes he would take the lead in the most nonsensical way. When my parents went into town with the larger children to buy things, he carried the money and did the talking. On such occasions he would be extraordinarily loquacious, while my mother would keep silent, basking in her aloofness. She would gaze at the men in the streets with the candor of a woman for whom love no longer holds any secrets, a woman whom no amount of unfaithfulness could lead into temptation. She must have had the feeling that no man white or brown could escape her, that for every man her hut was a prerequisite to further living. In love-making she radiated self-assurance, satiety, the gentle vanity lent by power and prestige. In other things she was childlike, stupid, a woman who could neither read nor write. My father's vanity, though, was not warranted by anything at all except a strong body and an outward handsomeness that did not become him.

One day my father brought an old sewing machine home from the market. My mother didn't know how to operate it, but it was set on a chest to remain there as a symbol of progress. Sometimes, visitors would give the wheel a surprised turn before they undressed. And my mother would laugh, more flattered than when a sailor took her buttocks in his hard hands or pressed his thirsty tongue into her mouth.

The sewing machine was never repaired, but it was oiled and polished from time to time. The clothes we needed my parents bought in town, where they were gypped by the white and yellow dealers. They didn't defend themselves, because to them money no longer meant subjection. They had set themselves free, free of the grim sheds where women sat sorting fruit or processing tobacco leaves, free of the hot wharves where men worked as coolies.

The last months of my mother's pregnancies were always the most difficult; out of sheer necessity she would go with her heavy belly and report to the overseer for work in one of his packing houses, and my father, too, would be absent for days at a stretch. In the evenings only a few visitors willing to be careful enough to respect the pregnancy of a whore came home with my mother. Often she satisfied them in another way than the customary, but the pieces of money did not get any the bigger for it. Usually they were only coppers. The birth of the child would reunite and strengthen the whole family. And as soon as it got dark my mother would gaily go to the harbor to entice the men with her breasts full of milk.—He suckles like a child, she would laugh when the sailor had left.

Later, after everything was over, I understood that it could never have gone on that way. One day the foreign police appeared at our hut—heavily perspiring men in white uniforms, with sun helmets on their heads. They forbade my mother to leave the vicinity of our house. A few days later she and my father were taken to the hospital with two of the younger children who were worst off. I myself, my elder brother, and the other younger brothers and sisters went to a mission home where our sores were cleaned and dressed. I was terrified of the needle the doctor used to prick me in the arm.

We never saw my father and my mother again. They died soon after they were taken into the hospital. They were buried in the graveyard for non-whites outside the city, where space had been cleared in the woods, a peaceful place as long as the monkeys were not screeching. We were allowed to go along to the burial, early in the morning while it was still cool. We had been dressed in white clothes, under which I could feel the scar of my nakedness. We began to sweat, just like the white people, but without the justification they derive from the memory of their cool motherland.

We had been told that there was a heaven, with angels, where all the people went who had lived good lives. The brown and black people would become white there, and night would never fall. I remember my curiosity about that heaven where all the races would be reconciled, just as once in my mother's lap. The everlasting light seemed to me a shortcoming. I thought of our fine evenings outside the hut, the moonglow dripping through the trees, the stars that

made my gaze reach infinitely far, my mother's laughter behind the bamboo curtains while the light fell outside in thin strips so that we never felt lonely. I have never liked white bodies, although I was called into the bedrooms of white women even when I was very young. I couldn't forget my mother's nakedness, which I was afterwards required to consider a sin. I never learned to believe it. I would see her brown breasts dancing, her body twisting in a careless voluptuousness that was her undoing. The sight of a shiny, well-oiled sewing machine still sends a quiver through me.

When I grew up and was turned free, I went down to the harbor. I saw the sailors coming from the ships as if nothing had changed in all those years: coughing old men and boys with new leather shoes, a dagger in their belts, a cigaret between their lips. I could smell the Virginia tobacco. I hated those men, not because they were white, but because they went to the women standing and waiting for them at the end of the wharf, young women with flowers in their hair and smiles wreathing their mouths.



TWO RIDERS, brush by Hendrik N. Werkman. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

The Foreign Girl

ADRIAAN VAN DER VEEN

Translated by Elizabeth Meijer

A SHORT TIME AGO I came across a post card. Then I remembered Klara. When we were playing in the street she often came and stood near us. This spoiled our game, but we did not like to admit that. Girls annoyed us. But because she was Hungarian she aroused our curiosity and we went up to her casually with our hands thrust in our pockets.

"What's your name?"

The girl with the dark, placid eyes said that she was called Klara. It may have been another name but I can only remember "Klara," and I can still hear the way she said it. We came closer to her and showed her our beautiful glass marbles; they were even too beautiful to risk in play. She moved forward, opened her hand in which she held the marbles so that the sun made them glitter, and she looked at them critically. And then with a silent nod she handed them back. She was not talkative. We did not say anything either. Finally my brother said, "Why do you come here?" He meant, "Why don't you say anything now that you're with us?" And I said, "Don't you like living in this country?"

Klara smiled and said, "It's different here."

"Poof," said a playmate of ours contemptuously.

"Have you been here long? You speak Dutch, don't you?" I continued.

"Yes," she said.

"When are you going back? You're going back, aren't you?"

"Yes," was once again her only reply. And after that she went off.

"She's a bore and a show-off," was the verdict passed by one of our friends. I remained silent and wondered what Hungary was like. Klara lived in a small house round the corner. An old woman looked after her. Sometimes they went out for a walk together. Then the woman used to lean on her. Once I saw her caressing Klara who

then began to blush.

On the long days during vacation when it rained incessantly and everything was grey we stood on the high stone steps in the street and looked at the raindrops splattering on the sidewalk. Then the Hungarian girl would sometimes come round the corner, always walking quickly as if she were short of time. She usually wore a loose, black cape and a large felt hat with a broad, soft brim. The boys sniggered at her hat at first, but they got used to it in the end.

On the other side of the street she would stop under the shelter of an awning. Then she was not in a hurry any more. Her shoulders were slightly hunched and she clutched the cape tightly around her. Her deep, dark eyes followed our games attentively. I can still remember the first time she smiled at me. It made me dizzy. A friend whispered, "Look at *her*," and gave me a poke. I waited a bit and then looked at her, quite casually.

When we played pantomime—aunt of mine—she would laugh now and then and I would play my part with abandon. My brother said, "Don't be so crazy." When she went away I saw her hesitate before she turned the corner, but she did not look round. In the evening I would think up errands and walk past the small house, anxiously wondering why I was so crazy. For my brother was right.

One warm evening we were in the street with friends. The sun had set and a flight of swallows was flying low in the sky. It was threatening to thunder. The children were all quiet, tired; their mothers were deliberately deferring calling them in. I leaned against a window frame and next to me a woman hanging out the window whispered—I did not see to whom—"That strange girl's always wandering round here." I gave a start and looked. There was Klara, walking slowly, oblivious to the disapproving glances she was receiving. She was wearing a long dress with a full skirt, she had white stockings on and was carrying her hat in her hand. Suddenly I heard a shrill voice. It came from the ice cream vendor's fat wife who was sharing out what was left of her supply before it went bad. The children crowded around her and came back licking their wafers triumphantly. Klara and I were the only ones who stood and did nothing.

"Hey there," the woman called out to me, "don't you want any?"

And she pushed a wafer into my hand.

"And her?" a girl asked.

The ice cream woman turned up her nose and sniffed. "I don't know her, let her go where she always goes."

Klara turned round. I stood there feeling confused, my ice cream was melting, I licked at the wafer. Then I ran up to her and tried to push the wafer into her hand. She laughed, but seeing my disappointed face pulled a bar of chocolate out of a pocket in her dress and pressed it into my hand. Then she disappeared around the corner.

Shyly I looked behind me at the boys. They were laughing and whispering and making significant gestures. "Aw, give us a bit . . ." they jeered at me, surrounding me with outstretched hands. I threw the ice cream and chocolate on to the ground and knew that I would not be able to show my face in the street in future.

We had been playing all the afternoon and watching the wild ducks on the lakes. After dinner I did not feel like it any more and I went to the woods alone. Dusk was falling, and it was already so dark that the birds had ceased to sing. On the path near the Driehoek I saw Klara. I had been avoiding her for some time. She was sitting bent over on the white bench, her head turned towards the trees. I jumped and turned back, but then changed my mind. Perhaps she had already seen me approaching. But she had not noticed anything and let me pass. I stood still, listened, then walked quickly to the bench and sat down next to her. She looked at me. "Why are you crying?" I asked. Neither of us said anything and I stared at my hands. Klara put away a white handkerchief. In the distance there was a clump of young birches, in front of them a grassy stretch with a hollow in which I often fought with my brother.

Suddenly I felt her hand on my arm. "Why did you ask me that?" She looked at me inquiringly, I saw that her hand was narrow and had long fingers—I shrugged my shoulders. It was quite dark when we walked back.

After the evening when everyone had had ice cream, except Klara, we never saw her in our street again. The boys did not even notice this. She seemed to avoid the woods too. I had only seen her once since then, on my way to school, when I looked through the

window of the grocery store. She was waiting her turn and staring straight ahead. No one would have spoken to her anyway.

Our next meeting was once again an unexpected one. I was trailing along behind the German band which stopped to play two numbers in every street. Now and then two cornet players would move away in different directions to perform an "antiphon." The cornets could then be heard in the distance. I was listening particularly to the clarinet which sometimes sounded like a bird. I leaned my head against the wall. Suddenly Klara appeared beside me. I saw that she was dressed in pink. She smiled at me and asked if I liked getting up early. Tomorrow morning she was going to go for a walk in the polders past the cemetery along the Vliet. After having made a date, she wanted to listen to the music. The band played a number about war and peace with a lot of rolls on the drum and finally "In der Heimat." I looked at Klara, but she pointed at the fat drummer who was bashing away at his drum and winking at the girls on the sidewalk. We followed the music for a long while.

The next morning the silent streets sounded hollow. I walked through the wet grass to the Vliet which seemed to have grown very broad, because the mists had not yet risen from the fields. At the water's edge I found Klara, wrapped in a woolly cape with a hood which I had not yet seen. She sheltered me with some of it and showed me a book containing strange pictures and written in her own language.

I asked her how she liked it here and threw out my arm to indicate the broad expanse of grey and blue where the mists were disappearing and the pointed church spires and a mill were once more visible. She stretched out her arm and wanted me to stroke it. Her arm was very brown and soft and covered with down hairs. Then we did not say anything for a long time until she said that I was much younger than she was, and that girls always knew a lot more than boys anyway. I did not understand her, nodded and reddened, and then asked her quickly if she sang and danced like the Hungarians. No, she did not sing or dance, but she had always liked to listen and watch. Nevertheless she tried to sing for me and I listened to her low voice which sometimes broke. Then she laughed and jumped to her feet; I had to give her my arm and we walked

for a long time along the Vliet. She loved the landscape in order to please me. I was late for school.

I met her occasionally after that. We followed the street musicians and now and then walked along the water. I was always thinking of her and often walked past her house. She knew that and sometimes moved a curtain to greet me.

Autumn had already come and it was raining when she pulled me by the arm: she was going back home again. Her eyes shone, she looked at me, but did not really see me. Before she ran away she promised me she would always write.

It was raining again. I was standing under the awning of the chemist's shop in her street watching the splattering raindrops when the taxi drew up. The driver pulled on the bell with an angry face. It was not necessary. Klara was already flying across the sidewalk into the car. The woman followed her. The taxi drove off and I retreated under the awning where I was sheltered from the rain. I pressed my forehead against the glass and stared into the shop window.

The furniture was fetched afterwards by a mover, the house was put up to let. A fortnight later I received a post card from Budapest, a dome and a big bridge. After that nothing else came. I hid the card. I did not want anyone to ask me about her.

The Decline and Fall of the Boslowits Family

GERARD KORNELIS VAN HET REVE

Translated by James S Holmes and Hans van Marle

MY FIRST CONTACT with the Boslowits family was at a children's Christmas party at some friends'. There were paper napkins on the table, with gay little red-and-green figures printed on them. In front of each plate burnt a candle in a socket carved from a half potato turned cut-edge down and covered neatly with dull green paper. The flowerpot holding the Christmas tree was covered the same way.

Near me, holding a slice of bread over the flame of his candle, sat Hansie Boslowits. "I'm making toast," he said. There was also a boy with a violin; while he was playing I almost had to cry, and I thought for a moment of giving him a kiss. I was seven years old then.

Hansie, who was two years older, began wiggling the branches of the Christmas tree with seeming nonchalance, until a branch above a candleflame began to sputter and emit a sharp scorching smell. People shouted, mothers came scurrying, and everyone near the tree was forced to sit down at the table or go to the other room, where a few children were playing dominoes on the floor.

The two Willink boys were there, too. They were the sons of a learned couple who let them go about with close-cropped heads because they were of the opinion that man's appearance is not the essential thing; this way it was easy to keep the boys' hair clean, and no valuable time had to be spent combing it. The cutting was done monthly by their mother with the family clippers—an important financial saving.

It was fine having the Willink boys around, because they would dare to do anything. Sometimes on Sundays they came with their parents to visit us. Then I would go out with them to wander around

the neighborhood and follow their example by throwing stones, rotten potatoes, or pieces of horse-dung through every open window. A wonderful fever of friendship would liberate me from all my fears.

At the Christmas party they amused themselves by holding a burning candle at an angle over someone's hand or arm until the hot tallow dripped on the victim's skin and he jumped up with a scream.

Hans Boslowits' mother saw it and said, "I don't think that's nice of you at all." But his father smiled: he admired the ingeniousness of it, and he didn't have to be afraid that anyone would try the joke on him, since he was an invalid, his whole lower body crippled by disease. After that evening I was to call them Aunt Jaanne and Uncle Hans.

I was very anxious to watch Uncle Hans leave, because I had seen him carried in by two other guests and the spectacle had fascinated me. But at half past eight, already, I had to go home with my parents.

Four days later, it was still Christmas vacation, I went with my mother on a visit to the Boslowits family. The street had a long, narrow stretch of grass down the middle, and we had to walk round it. "Well, big boy Simon," Uncle Hans said, "Hansie is in his room. Go play with him."

When I entered the room Hans asked, "What do you want?"

"To play with you, that's what your father said," I answered, taken aback.

He had on a pair of knickers and a green sweater, he was wearing glasses, and his black hair was plastered down and parted sharply. I looked around the room and caught sight of a small statue on the shelf above the convertible bed; on touching and smelling it, I found it to be a little dog made of soap.

"I made that," he said.

"Oh?" I asked. "At school?"

"By myself," he claimed, "at home, out of soap from the store." But I had already stopped believing him, because he had been confused for a moment by my question.

On his desk was an object that he kept looking at and picking up in a way designed to arouse my utmost curiosity. It was a metal box in the shape of a writing tablet, two fingers thick and a bit

slanting, with a push button at the top. The cover was surrounded by a frame with a transparent celluloid window in it. You could write words on the plate. Not only with a pencil, but with a stylus that wouldn't write otherwise, or with a stick; the words appeared in purple beneath the little window. If you pushed the little button everything that had been written disappeared. The possibility that such a thing could exist had never entered my mind.

I myself was given the opportunity to write on it and make what had been written go away with a push on the button. Sometimes, though, the apparatus refused to work, and the text remained wholly or partially visible.

"I'm going to throw it away," said Hans. "It's broken."

"It's a nice thing you can write on and it goes away when you push on it," I said to Aunt Jaanne, who came in just then. "Hans says he's going to throw it away."

"Now he's being bad again," Aunt Jaanne said. "He's going to throw it away because he doesn't want to give it away." All afternoon I kept hoping to possess the apparatus, but I didn't dare make any reference to it.

In the living room, too, were interesting objects. For example there was an armchair that was six feet long, covered with leather and resting on one round metal foot. Because of its easy-to-damage construction I was only allowed to lower myself into it sideways; then I could use my right arm to turn a wheel underneath, whose position determined the angle of the seat.

On the mantelpiece stood two old delft tiles, one depicting a fisherman, the other a skater. Potted plants in little antique copper pails lined the windowsill—there was a small indoor palm, and any number of cactus plants, including a ball-shaped one covered with rope-like growths that Aunt Jaanne called "the plant with grey hair."

We sat down to lunch, and we had knives with yellow ivory handles. The blades bore an elegantly engraved trademark with the letters H. B. L. "What do these letters stand for?" I asked, but my mother, Aunt Jaanne, and Uncle Hans were so engrossed in conversation that only Hansie heard the question.

"The H is for Hans," he said loudly, "and the B is for Boslowits."

"And the last letter?" I asked, waiting.

"But the L," he went on, "yes, the L!" He ticked on the knife-blade with his fork. "What that is for is known only to my father, me, and a few other people." I didn't want to bear the responsibility of asking something that there were weighty reasons for keeping secret, so I held my tongue.

After the meal there was something new: a woman came with Hans's brother Otto. I had already been instructed about him by my mother: "The boy is a little backward, so if you dare tease him . . ." she had said.

"Here we are again!" the woman called out, and turned the boy loose like a dog given the liberty to jump up on his master for a moment. He stooped forward when he walked, and he was wearing extraordinarily high shoes with toes that pointed in towards each other. He had on knickers, like his brother, and he was perspiring so heavily that strands of his colorless hair were plastered to his forehead. His face was strangely wrinkled, and his eyes didn't match.

"Well, are you here again, my little fellow?" his father said.

"Yeah," he called, "yeah, yeah father mother!" He kissed them both, and Hans. Then, standing still, he suddenly jumped into the air so hard that everything rumbled.

The violence frightened me, but he appeared to be harmless, as my mother had already told me.

"Go shake hands with Aunt Jettie," he was ordered, and after the words had been repeated for him several times he succeeded in bringing out "Aunt Jettie" and "hello aunt," until they finally got him to say the combination, "Hello Aunt Jettie."

"And this is Simon," said Aunt Jaanne.

"Hello, Otto," I said, and shook his sopping-wet hand.

He jumped into the air again and got a piece of candy, a bonbon Aunt Jaanne stuffed into his mouth. Every time anyone asked him something—in the usual way, without expecting an answer—he would shout "Yeah yeah," "Yeah mother," driving the words out forcibly. Someone put a portable phonograph on the table, and the woman who had come with Otto wound it up.

"He stayed dry last night," she said.

"Oh, that's good, what a good boy, Otto; you stayed completely

dry, didn't you?" his mother asked. "Isn't he a good boy, Annie?"

"Yes, he's been a good boy, haven't you, Otto?" the nurse answered.

"What do you say now?" his mother asked, "—Yes, Nurse Annie."

"Yes Nurse Annie." After an endless struggle he got it out, all in one breath.

He was busy sorting out phonograph records from a box. He held each one up close to his face with both hands, as though he were smelling it. His nose was red and damp, with a small yellow pimple at the end of it.

"He smells which ones they are," explained Uncle Hans, helping to sort from where he sat in his chair.

"This one," he said, and handed one to Otto.

The boy took the record, inspected it, sighed, and leaned on the table with his elbow for a moment; unluckily he happened to lean on a record, and with a quick little sound it snapped into thirds. I shouted something, but Uncle Hans took the pieces and looked at the label, then said, "A very old one, Otto."

"Old one!" Otto forced out, and put the record that his father had indicated on the turntable.

It was not like the other records: it was brown and thin and looked as if it was manufactured of cardboard or paper. Only one side was playable. Hans put a rubber piece on the turntable rod, because the record bulged upward a bit. When it started to play, a flat voice said, "The Loriton Record, to which you are now listening, is suitable for recordings of every sort. It is light in weight and flexible, and it is three times as durable as the ordinary record."

Then the speaker introduced a dance orchestra. When it had finished playing the voice said, "The Loriton Record can only be played on one side, but if you will check with your watch you will see that it plays twice as long on one side as an ordinary record. And, ladies and gentlemen, the price is no more than half."

Otto was jumping up and down with impatience. His mother quickly chose another record, a small one with a pink label. Two voices sang a song about the three little children.

Outside the windows, a fine, drizzly rain was falling. I sneaked

to Hans' room, where I looked at the little dog and felt and wrote on the writing apparatus until I was called to go home.

On the way I asked my mother, "How old is Otto?" "A bit older than you are, pet," she answered, "but remember you must never ask at Uncle Hans's how old Otto is." It seemed to me that the rain suddenly blew a bit harder against us.

I was lost in my thoughts, but I heard my mother add, "They're afraid that Otto won't be taken care of after they're gone." These two bits of information gave me food for days of thought.

Only with the second visit did it become clear to me from the conversation that Otto didn't live there, but at a children's home, and that the woman who brought him was a friend of Aunt Jaanne's who was a nurse at the institution.

It was on a Sunday, and my father went along. When we came in Otto was being talked about in a reprimanding tone. Hans was standing in front of the window and Otto by the antique cabinet with glass doors; Uncle Hans was sitting in a chair beside the table.

"Yes," Aunt Jaanne said, going into the room ahead of us, "we were just talking about Otto."

"Yeah," Otto shouted, "yeah mother!"

"There was a bowl of grapes in the next room, in the office," said Uncle Hans—what he meant was his small study on the street side. "I wondered why he was coming in all the time. And each time he picked off a grape from the bowl, and now they're all gone."

Otto laughed and jumped into the air. His face was glistening with sweat. "Mother doesn't think it's funny at all," Aunt Jaanne said. "You've been very naughty, Otto."

"Otto naughty!" he yelled, his face twisted anxiously.

The phonograph was playing busily most of the time, and the talking grew still more noisy when the Fontains appeared. I had never seen Mrs. Fontain before, but I had heard at home that whenever she came upon an acquaintance carrying a shopping bag she would hide behind a fence or in a doorway so she wouldn't have to say hello to someone who went out for her own groceries. I had also heard that whenever she was somewhere visiting in the evening she would leave for an hour to go back home and see whether her nineteen-year-old-son had gone to sleep. She was called Aunt Ellie,

but grown-ups made fun of her as "crazy Ellie."

Once my mother had gone to see her at home, and she had talked to my mother in the hall, saying that the chiropodist was there; but she had stuffed a gigantic bonbon in my mother's mouth, with the words, "Actually it's one for high society, but I'll let you have it." At home my mother had given only a feeble imitation of her nasal tonsillitis-sufferer's voice, but now I heard the sound unadulterated.

Aunt Ellie's husband, my father, and Uncle Hans went to the study, uncle Hans propelling himself forward in an extraordinary way, first searching for support with his hands, hunching over, and then letting his frail legs swing forward with a jerk, one after the other.

I followed them through the hall and went into the room behind Uncle Hans. "Was that crazy Ellie there?" I asked Uncle Hans, pointing back in the direction of the living room. Later I comprehended that this question, asked in her husband's presence, must have embarrassed Uncle Hans extremely. He fumbled in his vest pocket till he found a quarter and gave it to me, saying, "You go buy yourself an ice-cream cone."

I went outside just as an ice-cream man was passing. I put the quarter on the cart and said, "An ice-cream cone."

"A five-cent one?" he asked.

"That's all right," I said.

"Or a ten-cent one?"

"That's all right. An ice-cream cone," I said.

"For five cents or ten cents?" he asked then. There was no definite decision reached, but he made a very large one, and I was taking it from him just as my mother came outside.

"He's been naughty," she said to the man. "He's been begging for it." I kept hold of the ice-cream cone. My mother pulled me along with her. "He still has some change coming!" the ice-cream man called out, but we were already inside and the door banged shut. The ice-cream cone didn't taste good, and I was allowed to put it on a plate in the kitchen.

After that, visits were exchanged regularly. On my birthday my new aunt and uncle gave me a metal toy car that wound up,

and I tried not to let them know that I was really too old for it.

Usually they spent New Year's Eve with us, and my father would carry Uncle Hans upstairs with the help of the taxi driver.

Uncle Hans's condition remained the same all those years, but I remember that one afternoon at our place Aunt Jaanne said there was a lameness that had begun in his right arm and came back regularly. It was the same year I started going to a junior high school very near the Boslowitses' apartment. The Sunday before the new school year began I went to see them. I was requested to stay for lunch.

Aunt Jaanne was telling her sister that she had put Hansie in a boarding school in Laren, because things couldn't go on the way they were. After the meal, while Uncle Hans was sitting in his study, she said, "When he has a quarrel with his father he puts his hand on the man's head. And that makes him so furious; it's horrible."

She went on to say that a neighbor woman she had talked with that morning over the garden fence had more or less reproached her for the decision, saying, "You already have one boy away from home, and now to send this son away too . . ." "I've been lying on the sofa all morning crying," said Aunt Jaanne.

"She has her nerve to say that," her sister said. "What business is it of hers?"

I said, "Tomorrow school starts there." I pointed in the direction of the building around the corner. "Do you think I'll get homework the very first day?"

"Well, no, I don't think so," Aunt Jaanne said.

Now that Hans wasn't there I hunted through his room out of curiosity, but I didn't find anything of interest. The little dog was still there, but the writing apparatus had disappeared long since.

When Aunt Jaanne came in, I said, "I wanted to borrow a few books," and took up a position in front of the bookcase as though I were deep in reflection. "These." Without thinking, I pulled out two volumes of *Bully and Beanpole*, a children's story about a fat boy and a lean one, and *The Book of Jeremiah Called Michael*. "If Hansie doesn't mind," I said.

"If we don't mind," Aunt Jaanne said. "But you're in good

with us."

"I'll bring them back before long," I said.

Three years before the war the Boslowits family moved to an apartment looking out on the river, a side-canal, and a lot that was being filled in for construction. There was a granite entryway with twenty steps to climb. From there I watched the large-scale aerial-defense exercises that were held one day, I think it was in autumn.

The Boslowitses had invited a large number of people to come and watch, and the younger generation climbed through a window at the head of the stairs above the top-floor neighbors' apartment, and onto the roof. Sitting beside the chimney, straddling the ridge, we watched the barrels of the anti-aircraft guns on the vacant sand lot spring back for a shot each time a formation of airplanes passed, a moment before we heard the sound. Fifty yards ahead of us machine-gunners were shooting from the roof of a large mansion set off from the other houses. The Willink boys were there with us, throwing pebbles they had brought along especially for the purpose. Sirens sounded the air-raid alarm and the sky grew overcast. Then new squadrons of airplanes passed over, flying through the cloudlets of the anti-aircraft explosions and discharging green, glowing balls that burned out before they reached the ground. The aerial-defense fire squad spouted water into the canal and the river to test its equipment. At the end of all the turmoil, an amphibian plane landed on the river and skimmed along the surface, then climbed again, over the big bridge connecting the southern and eastern parts of town. I was highly satisfied with the spectacle. Everyone was given tea with crisp, salty crackers.

Half a year later we moved to the center of town, no more than a ten-minute walk from the Boslowits family, on the opposite side of the river. Now we could exchange visits more frequently. Aunt Jaanne came regularly, and on the afternoons when Otto had no school—he was learning paper mat-weaving and bead-stringing somewhere—she would fetch him from the children's home and bring him along to our place for a bit of a change. Walking home from high school one Friday, I saw them approaching from the other direction, Otto hunched over more than ever, springing about like a dancing bear on a chain, so that his mother could hardly hold

onto his hand. The eight-year-old neighbor girl from the second floor was jumping rope, and she had fastened one end of the cord to the iron fence around one of the narrow front yards, so she would only have to use one hand to swing the rope. When Otto's mother turned him loose so he could gallop full speed towards our house, the girl purposely stretched out her rope in his path. He stumbled but didn't fall. The girl let go of the rope and fled before Aunt Jaanne, who was so furious she could hardly make a sound.

She went upstairs in a passion, right behind Otto, and I followed them. Otto leaped into the hall with a rumble, looking forward to the few old picture postcards my mother gave him each time he came. "That anybody," said Aunt Jaanne, "that anybody could do such a thing—can you understand it? If I had been able to get my hands on her, I would have done I don't know what to her." She grew a bit calmer, but kept on blinking her eyes—a habit I noticed then for the first time.

"Let's go see if we have a postcard for you," my mother said.

"Yeah Aunt Jettie!" Otto forced out, dancing along with her to the cupboard. She dug out three of the cards from a cigar box. He sniffed at them and jumped in the air.

"Be careful, boy. There are people living downstairs," my mother said.

"Where's Otto going?" asked Aunt Jaanne.

"Yeah yeah mother!"

"Where are you going?"

"Yeah mother!"

"No, Otto, you know well enough. Where are you going?" When Otto had still not given a satisfactory answer, she said, "To Russia."

"To Russia yeah mother!" Otto shouted.

"You see, Jettie," said Aunt Jaanne, "a professor in Russia has completely cured a number of children by an operation. And ever since then, he's going to Russia." Another bit of news had to do with Uncle Hans's condition. He had collapsed and was in bed, and his right arm was paralyzed almost all the time. "And besides that there's his temper," she said. "That's something terrible."

As a more encouraging bit of information, she told us that a

doctor who had treated Uncle Hans ten years before had come to visit and had said, "Man, I thought you'd died a long time ago."

That wasn't all the news. They were thinking of buying a new wheelchair for Uncle Hans so that when he had got a bit better he would be able to be outside in the air more and could go visiting here and there without it costing so much.

"But he doesn't want to," said Aunt Jaanne, "because he thinks he'll seem like an invalid then."

"But that's what he is," my mother said.

Uncle Hans did get his wheelchair, despite his opposition, but not until quite a while later. It was a three-wheeled one, propelled by levers that turned the front wheel and guided the vehicle at the same time. It had to be taken from a garage each time, and then Uncle Hans had to be carried down the high stone entryway. He hadn't had the wheelchair long before they rented a ground floor apartment. It was in the street behind ours. Though it was a dark, dank house, there were advantages to it, since the Block Committee agreed to having the wheelchair stand in the entry, and a friend who was a carpenter made a letter box in a window-pane in Uncle Hans's study so the postman could drop his letters practically on his desk. Going out in the wheelchair was an act of his own in appearance only, for someone had to push him—his thin hands, and especially the right one, had no strength at all.

One Sunday afternoon we—my parents and I—were coming back from a birthday party together with Otto, Aunt Jaanne, and Uncle Hans, and I was patiently pushing the wheelchair. We were crossing a bridge that sloped rather steeply. On the other side of the canal we had to turn left. On the downslope the wheelchair began to go faster and faster; I held it back, but Uncle Hans ordered me to let loose. I obeyed. There was an intersection just beyond the bridge, and the presence of a traffic policeman made it impossible to turn left right away. Vehicles had to wait for the traffic signal, then cross over and line up on the right side of the street.

But Uncle Hans zoomed down the bridge and cut diagonally around the corner without waiting. "You can't do that," I called after him. Right behind the traffic policeman he veered left, but his velocity and the incline made the wheelchair topple over and hit

the street with a bang. The policeman and some pedestrians came hurrying up and set the wheelchair upright, with Uncle Hans still in it. He hadn't been hurt at all, but he said nothing, and even after we got to the Boslowitses he sat at the table in silence, staring straight ahead.

Aunt Jaanne comforted Otto, because she thought he had seen the fall and was frightened by it. "It wasn't father that tipped over, but someone else, wasn't it, Otto; it was some other man, not father."

"Not father!" Otto shouted, and he leaned his elbow on a teacup, which broke. It was a grey day with no rain falling, though a still sky constantly threatened it.

On my sixteenth birthday, that same spring, Hansie came along with Aunt Jaanne and Uncle Hans to visit. His mother had decided to have him come back home. "If there's going to be a war, I'd rather have him at home," she said. He was to be a salesman in an uncle's business.

"You say if there's going to be a war, as if there's nothing going on now," my father said. At that my interest in the conversation was aroused. It was true that England and France were at war with Germany, but to my dissatisfaction there had not been any military activities of importance to follow.

From time to time I went to the movies with Joost, the younger of the two Willink boys, and before the main feature there would be some insignificant news shots from the front, with camouflaged cannon standing ready or firing a shot every quarter of an hour. Once there was a favorable exception to this monotony in some shots of the grounded German battleship *Graf von Spee*, beautifully unraveled and shattered. "Horrors of the war, fine," Joost said in a comical tone as a shot from the air gave a last view of the wreckage.

"What I'd like best is short, violent street fighting here in town," I said. "From window to window, with hand grenades and white flags. But not for more than two days, because then it would be boring again."

One evening in May when I went to ask if we could borrow an electric toaster from the Boslowitses, I found Uncle Hans, Aunt Jaanne, and Hansie together in the twilight. There was a neighbor visiting them. They were so deep in conversation that they didn't

notice it right away when I came in. "That means something," the neighbor said. "I say that has a significance. It means a lot more than we know." Confused, I stood waiting in the door to the sitting room for a little bit, till Aunt Jaanne caught sight of me.

"Oh, it's you," she said. "Have you heard that the furloughs are all canceled? This man's son has to be back this evening already, and be in the barracks tonight."

"No," I said, "is that so?"

"That's what they said over the radio," the neighbor said.

"Then there's something in the air anyway," I said, and I felt a deep emotion rising inside me. That same week, on Thursday night, almost everyone in the neighborhood appeared in the streets a few hours after midnight. Airplanes went droning over, anti-aircraft thundered, and searchlights pushed their shafts upwards between the thin tufts of clouds.

"They're getting something to put up with again over in England," said a milkman who had concluded that they were German planes on their way to English cities and being shot at over Dutch territory by our neutral military forces. He proved to be right about the nationality of the planes, but the rest of his hypothesis was refuted when we came to realize the meaning of the deep thuds and flashes of light on the southwest horizon.

A little after seven o'clock Aunt Jaanne came upstairs. I wasn't there at the time, because the Willink boys and their sister had come for me. I had gone along to their house, and from the balcony I could see black clouds of smoke hovering above a spot that couldn't be anything but Schipohl Airport.

"It's war," said the Willink girl, whose name was Lies. We went back to my house together, elated at so many thrilling events all at one time. It was a quarter to eight.

"It's war," said my mother. "It's been on the radio already." "What did they say exactly?" I asked. "Oh, I can't repeat it all, you should have listened yourself then," she answered.

Aunt Jaanne sat in the easy chair with a black velvet cap on her head, blinking her eyes. The radio was dead, and we sat waiting impatiently for the beginning of the regular broadcasting day at eight o'clock. It was the custom to introduce the day's broadcasts

with a rooster's crow.

"I wonder if they'll do cock-a-doodle-doo the same as usual this morning," said my father, coming in from the hall.

I fervently hoped that the rumors flying through the neighborhood were all true. "Really at war, wonderful," I said to myself softly.

The radio clock began the soft poise it makes before it strikes. After the sixteen notes of the chime, it struck, slow and clear. Then the rooster crowed. "That's really a shame!" said my father.

I was frightened, because everything could still be spoilt. This was probably proof that war hadn't broken out at all. I was put at ease only when it was announced that the borders of Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg had been crossed by German troops.

I went to school that morning content, while Aunt Jaanne still sat staring straight ahead without saying a word.

At school a solemn mood prevailed. The building was to be used as a hospital, and the headmaster made an announcement of the fact in the auditorium. After that we all sang the national anthem. The fact that the school was closed for the time being made the day still lighter, as though all things had been made new.

We didn't see Aunt Jaanne again until the next Tuesday afternoon. She came to visit us alone, and she looked pale. "What are you doing?" she asked. "What a smell—is there something burning? Things look pretty bad."

"Pretty bad," my mother said. "They've just capitulated."

We had begun burning books and pamphlets in the stove, and it puffed and smoked from being stuffed overfull. At the same time my brother and my father were busy filling two burlap bags and a suitcase with books. After dark they threw them in the canal.

Everywhere in the neighborhood fires glowed that evening, with new loads of things to be burned being carried up constantly, sometimes chestful at a time. Many other people threw everything in the canals. Sometimes, in the general haste, this or that was left lying on the edge. Wandering along the canal in the twilight, I found a book with a flaming red cover—I have forgotten the title—that my mother later took out of my room and refused to give back.

After the announcement of the capitulation, Aunt Jaanne let it be repeated to her once more and then suddenly went away. The

following day brought two interesting events. Towards noon the first Germans rode into the city. They were men on motorcycles, dressed in spotless green capes. A few people stood along the road to watch them coming over the bridge. Aunt Jaanne had seen them too, and when she came to see us Wednesday evening she called them "frogs."

I wasn't at home, because I was busy. Hundreds of fish had come swimming to the surface of the canals, gulping for air—it was said because salt water had been let into the canals by mistake. I was catching those in front of the house with a big fishnet; they made no attempt to escape, and I took home a pail full of them.

The next day school began again, and the very first evening I went seeking consolation at a small movie-house where that week, for the last time, there was still a French film. The movie, *Hôtel du Nord*, was about a suicide pact in which the boy succeeded in shooting the girl, then lacked the courage to turn his gun on himself. But the girl recovered, and it all ended with a reconciliation between them and an acceptance of life when she came to meet him at the prison after he had served his sentence. I felt satisfied with the way the problem was solved.

At home I found Aunt Jaanne sitting on the sofa and my mother pouring coffee.

It was dusky in the room, because the lights hadn't been turned on yet. Unrolling the blackout paper and fastening it with thumb-tacks was a cumbersome job. And so I found them sitting by the pensive light of the tea warmer.

"You have to blackout," I said. "That light shines outside."

"You do it then, will you?" said my mother.

I remember that one window was ajar when I let down the roll of paper. "Hans sent a letter to an aunt in Berlin, quite a while ago," Aunt Jaanne said. "It just came back, undeliverable. Moved, destination unknown, it said on it."

Just then a gust of wind lifted the blackout paper and the curtain for a few seconds, chasing a piece of paper off the table. I shut the window quickly.

Late one afternoon when there was no school I dropped by the Boslowitses. It was high summer, and Uncle Hans was sitting in

front of his office-window in the sun. Almost immediately he turned the conversation to his sickness and a doctor called Witvis, who had already been there several times and wanted to try something new to cure him. "He'll have to make me run like a rabbit," he said. "You'd like to have a cigaret, wouldn't you?" he asked, and got up to look for the box. "Tell me where they are and I'll get them," I said, but he shuffled to the corner of the room and took a flat, square copper box from a table. "Are you laughing?" he asked, his back turned towards me. "No, honest," I said.

Hans came in and sat down on his father's desk. "How's it going?" I asked. "That selling, do you like it?"

"Today my turnover was near a thousand guilders," he answered.

"Is there any news?" asked Aunt Jaanne.

"News that the Germans are advancing on Brest," I answered. "They're making a terrific hullabaloo on the radio." Then I told them what a fat boy in my class had claimed. According to a prediction made by a French priest forty years before, the Germans were to be defeated near Orléans. "He also wrote that the city on the Meuse will be destroyed," I said.

Aunt Jaanne said, "If you'll bring me the book that says that, I'll give you something."

That same afternoon, not long before dinner, I went to the Willinks for a little while to tell them the latest news from the radio. Just after I sat down in Eric's room the anti-aircraft artillery began popping restlessly. Two airplanes glistened in the sunlight, flying so high it was impossible to make out their forms, but only a glittering reflection.

A bit later we heard the rattle of machine guns and the terrifying sound of a fighter plane zooming by close overhead. From time to time when the noise grew too strong, we would hurry inside from the balcony; we could also hear the rattling of the plane's guns.

Then it was still for a moment, and we saw a black swath through the sky with a flaming star dropping rapidly at the point of it. The light was white, like the light of an acetylene torch. Then we saw a second column of smoke beside the flame: the plane had broken in two.

After a moment it all disappeared behind the houses. There

were no parachutes to be seen anywhere in the sky. "May God guard those who fare on the sea and in the sky," I said solemnly. No air-raid alarm had been given.

After dinner Hans Boslowits came to our house. "Do you know what kind of a plane it was that came down?" he asked.

"No, I don't know," I said.

"It was German," he declared.

"How do you know?" I asked. "Have you already heard where it came down?"

"Look," Hans said, polishing his glasses with his handkerchief, "we have our sources of information."

"I hope it's so," I said, "but I don't believe anyone can know anything for sure yet."

"We have our sources of information," he said, and went away.

The next day, I'm certain it was a weekday, on my way home from the movies in the afternoon I saw the announcement of the French surrender being posted as a bulletin in front of a newspaper office. When I gave a résumé at home, my mother said, "Then they're asking for an armistice. That's not the same thing. Go to Aunt Jaanne's and tell her exactly what it said."

"It may be propaganda," Aunt Jaanne said, but I could tell she didn't doubt the announcement for an instant. That same evening she came to our place, and it was then that she told us what had happened to her all of four weeks earlier.

One afternoon two Germans in uniform had come in an automobile. "Put your hands up," one of them had said on entering Uncle Hans's room. "Don't be witty, mister," he had answered in German, "I can't even stand on my legs."

They had searched the apartment and then declared that he had to go along. Uncle Hans had gone to get dressed; once they saw him dragging himself through the house his crippled state became so completely obvious they must have realized the foolishness of making an arrest. Then they watched Aunt Jaanne fasten a rubber flask for urinating onto his waist. "They asked if I was the only one that could do that," she went on. "I said I was the only one. Then they wrote down some more and went away again. It wasn't very pleasant though." She blinked her eyes, and a few slight quivers

shot through the muscles of her face.

"How is Uncle Hans, anyway?" my mother asked.

"He's not getting any worse," Aunt Jaanne said. "Just now he's able to use that hand to write with again."

"That's something," said my mother.

Summer and fall went drably by. It was after New Year's, dull, damp spring-like weather. The second Sunday in the new year the parents of my school pal Jim had asked me to dinner, and unexpectedly I ran into Hansie there. Jim's father was a wholesale dealer in veal and had an amazingly fat belly, but he took things lightly and was a lot of fun. Although he had had three stomach operations, he didn't allow it to restrict him in any way.

"I like everything, so long as there aren't any pins in it," he said at the table. As a gesture of friendliness they had also invited my parents, whom they didn't know.

"I don't read German books any more," said a small grey-haired man when the conversation was on literature for a moment. At once the talk turned to the war and surmises of how long it would last.

"Now I'd say half a year at the outside," said Jim's father. "But actually he's not going to hold out that long."

"The way it's going now, it could last twenty-five years," my father said, smiling.

Hansie, who proved to know one of Jim's brothers, had his guitar with him, and he played a renowned tune, *Skating on the Rainbow*, with a great deal of violence. When talk of the war came up, he said, "It's going to be over this year."

"What makes you think so, Hans?" asked my mother.

He answered, "The circles who keep me informed know very well, Aunt Jettie—I repeat, very well—what's going on."

Five or six weeks later Aunt Jaanne climbed the steps to our apartment, flushed with excitement. "The greenies are catching the boys all around Waterlooplein," she said. "Can Simon go look for me? No, he had better go to Hansie's office and tell him he can't go out on the streets. But wait, I'll call him up. Have Simon wait."

"First come and sit down," my mother said. It was a Wednesday afternoon. We succeeded in calming Aunt Jaanne, "Now go call

up Hansie," my mother said.

"I already have," she said.

"Oh, have you?" my mother said.

"I'm going to go around there and have a look," I declared.

"You'll be careful, won't you?" asked my mother.

I cycled quickly to the neighborhood around Waterlooplein and brought back a detailed report on everything. Uncle Hans puffed slowly on his stubby black pipe. "You've got on a nice sweater there," he said in the middle of my account. "Is it new?"

Aunt Jaanne was busy constantly telephoning the office where Hansie worked. He was to stay there at night; I heard her promise to take him bedding and food. At her request I took the telephone. "Don't believe that what you're going to say will be of the slightest importance, high and mighty Simon," said the voice on the other end.

"Is that so," I answered, smiling, because Aunt Jaanne was keeping a close eye on me.

"That woman sure jaws a lot," he went on. "Just tell her for me that she's a horrible old jawer."

The receiver had a very clear tone, so I drummed on the floor with my left foot. "Yes, that's right," I said loudly. "I can imagine that. Fine."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"That's it exactly," I said, "that in any case you'll be careful—but you are, so I hear. Goodbye. See you." And I put down the receiver, even though Hans had suddenly begun to shout so loudly that the telephone emitted squeaking sounds.

"Well, what did he say?" asked Aunt Jaanne.

"He says," I replied, "that we are all nervous and say crazy things to each other. But you shouldn't be at all worried, he says. Of course he'll stay inside. He says in a day everything will be over."

"You can talk on the telephone again," said Aunt Jaanne, satisfied. Then she looked out of the window and said, "Don't be worried: it's a nice theory."

Four days later Aunt Jaanne came to see my mother, who was at some friends' somewhere and might be back any moment. While Aunt Jaanne sat waiting for her, the fat magician who lived around the corner also came up the stairs. On the steps he always whistled

the melody that preceded broadcasts from London. "You shouldn't whistle like that on the stairs," I said. "You don't get anywhere by it, and it's dangerous."

After he had listened to what meager news there was, he said, "I think they're going to lose, only I don't know whether it'll be before I'm dead and buried or after." He shook with laughter and went away, whistling the melody loudly on the stairs. He had barely gone when my mother came home.

Only then did Aunt Jaanne say, "Parkman's daughter is dead." She explained how the daughter and son-in-law of a neighbor across the street from her had swallowed poison together. The man had been revived in the hospital and was recovering. "He's screaming, and they have to hold him down," Aunt Jaanne said. Whom did she mean, I thought, the father or the husband?

June was very mild, a bright, sunny early-summer month. One afternoon while my mother was sitting in front of the open window knitting, Aunt Jaanne came in with Otto. She looked pale, and the skin of her face was cracked and chalky, though she didn't use powder. "Mother mother," Otto called impatiently.

"Be quiet a little, dear, that's a sweet boy," said Aunt Jaanne.

She had to tell about something that had happened to a nephew of hers. Cycling through the heart of town, he had violated a traffic regulation and was stopped by a man in black boots, partly uniformed, partly in civilian dress. The man had grinned as he wrote down the name.

One evening a few days afterwards, a nondescript man in dark-colored clothes came to the door. He said that the nephew had to appear at an office somewhere in the center of town the next afternoon because of a traffic violation—in order, so he said, to settle the affair.

The boy went, but his mother went along. At the entrance to the office she was held back, but her son was allowed to enter. After twenty minutes he came stumbling outside, vomiting. There were several welts and bleeding gashes on his face and dirt on his clothes as though they had been dragged across the floor.

For a high fee, the two of them took a cab with rubber tires and a pony to pull it. When they got home the doctor found a

slight brain concussion and a contusion of the left shoulder blade, and the collar bone on the same side was broken.

They had let him wait in a little room. The man who had stopped him on the street came in first, then he called in some others, part of them carrying billy clubs. "This is a sassy kid that called me bastard," he explained. One of the others struck the boy under the chin and then all six or seven of them began hitting and kicking him.

"It started all at once," he had told Aunt Jaanne. One man with greasy hair kept trying to kick him in the groin. He stumbled in his attempt to avoid the man's blows and ended up lying on his back. Before he could take up a safer position, one of the men stamped on his chest. After he had turned over, someone, he thought the grey-haired man, stood on his back.

Then a bell rang or a whistle blew, in any case there was a shrill sound that made everybody stop; after that he heard all kinds of voices, but he couldn't remember anything about what happened from then on until he came outside.

"You know that Joseph's people got notice of his death?" said Aunt Jaanne.

"No," my mother said, "I didn't know."

"But they had a letter from him from camp, too, with a lot later date," Aunt Jaanne went on, "but now they don't hear any more news."

They fell silent. Aunt Jaanne looked at Otto and said, "The doctor has given him some powders. He's stayed dry for two nights already, I heard from the nurse." My mother remembered that she had neglected to give Otto any picture postcards, and she hunted out two of them from the cupboard; one was in bright colors, a view of some foreign city with a pink sky.

When I went to see Hans Boslowits one evening several weeks later, he was busy playing his guitar. He would slap the strings with his open hand and beat up and down with his foot. At my request he played *O Joseph, Joseph*, but I wasn't pleased by the performance because he followed the melody by singing "ta ta ta ta" with too much emphasis, tilting his head up so that his throat was foolishly tensed.

"It's the heartbeat of our society, this music," he said. At that moment someone tapped on the panel of the living-room door. The visitor had already come in the hall; he called out his name loudly and Aunt Jaanne answered, "Yes, come on in, neighbor."

"Mrs. Boslowits," said the neighbor, entering, "I don't suppose you've heard yet that Dr. Witvis is dead?"

"How can that be?" Aunt Jaanne asked.

"I only heard it just now," he said. "It happened last night."

Late in the evening, he went on, the doctor had taken a razor and slashed both his two small sons' wrists, holding their forearms in a basin of warm water while he did it because that prevented pain. After his wife had opened the artery on her wrist herself, he cut his the same way. The order of events was deduced from the position of the victims and the presence of a second razor in his wife's hand. The mother and the children were already dead when they were found, and the father was unconscious. He was given a blood transfusion in the hospital after the wound had been closed, but he died before noon without having regained consciousness.

When I went to the Boslowitses to borrow half a loaf of bread one Sunday afternoon late in the fall, I found Otto beside the phonograph.

"Otto is going on a trip," Aunt Jaanne said. "Isn't that right, Otto?"

"Yeah mother," he called, "Otto on trip!"

"Where under the sun is he going to?" I asked.

Aunt Jaanne's face gave the impression of being inflamed by fever. "He can't stay at the children's home or the school any more," she answered. "He has to go to Apeldoorn. I'm taking him there tomorrow."

I saw only then that the sliding doors to the back room stood open, and Uncle Hans lay there in bed. The bedstead had white iron rods, with copper globes at the four corners. The sick man's face was thin, but even so it looked swollen, as though it was moist inside.

On a chair were bottles of medicine, a breakfast plate with a knife, and a chessboard. "I was playing chess with Hans this afternoon," he said, "but Otto was always tipping it over."

He kept to his bed the following days as well, and his situation turned serious. Winter was coming, and the new doctor said that the rooms should be kept quite warm. For a long time Uncle Hans could still go to the bathroom by himself, but eventually he had to be helped.

"He's so awfully heavy I can't do it," Aunt Jaanne said. "Actually he doesn't cooperate."

After New Year's the doctor strongly recommended his being admitted to a hospital, and he was taken there early that same week.

"He has it really fine," Aunt Jaanne told my mother after a visit, "and the doctors and the nurses are all so nice."

"He doesn't have any notion of things any more," she went on soon after that. "I don't understand what's going on inside him nowadays. Hansie took him some oranges—he could buy them from someone at the office. He says, father, these cost sixty cents apiece, be sure you eat them. But he didn't eat a single one; he gave them all away. Of course you should share things, but this is enough to make you furious."

"From tomorrow on we have to be inside at eight o'clock," Aunt Jaanne said to my mother one day late in the spring. "Will you go on the evening visiting hours? I can't get back in time and what good does it do Hans if I have to go away again after three minutes? I'll just stay a little longer in the daytime then; they won't mind that."

"He looks good, he's getting fat," my mother said after she had been to visit the first time, reporting to Aunt Jaanne at her place the same evening. But Aunt Jaanne was not much interested. Hansie wasn't home yet, and she asked my mother to go somewhere and call his office, because their telephone had just been taken away.

"Have Simon go to the office and see if he's still there." My mother was at the point of going to carry out her request when Hansie came in. The streets had been cordoned off, and they had been warned at the office. He waited till everything seemed quiet again, but half-way home he had had to take refuge in a public toilet. Finally eight o'clock had come and he had finished the last section, through our neighborhood, on the run.

"We aren't allowed to go out of the city any more," Aunt

Jaanne said one night when I came to tell her that my mother couldn't visit Uncle Hans the next Friday evening. "Ask your mother if she'll go see Otto this week."

The next day, a Wednesday afternoon, Aunt Jaanne came to our home. "They're taking inventory," she said. After my mother had asked her to sit down and had poured her a cup of apple tea, she said that the inventory takers had been at all the neighbors' in her building—two men, each with a briefcase. They had inspected everything and noted it all down.

They had found the first-floor neighbors' five-year-old son playing with a little dark red toy purse on the stairs. One of the two men took it away from him, opened it, and fished out a nickel five-cent piece and three small silver pieces, then gave it back. "That one isn't a quarter," the child said, "it's something that there isn't any more, my father said."

"You just be very still, little boy," the man had said then. "Very still."

It was impossible to determine whether or not she had heard the knock on her door; at any rate they had disappeared without visiting her apartment.

She asked me to go along with her right away, and she had me pack a Frisian clock, some antique pottery, two carved ivory candlesticks, and the two tiles into a suitcase and take them with me. I carried them to our house and made two more trips to get old china plates, a camera, and a small, delicate mirror.

Every other week, usually on a Tuesday, my mother went to visit Otto in the big institution at Apeldoorn. The first time, Aunt Jaanne sat at our place in the afternoon waiting for her to come back. "How was it?" she asked my mother. "He looks fine," my mother answered, "and he was awfully glad to see me. The nurses are all very kind to him."

"Didn't he ask about home?" asked Aunt Jaanne.

"No, not at all," my mother said, "and he was having fun playing with the other children. When I went away he looked sad for a moment, but that he misses anything really—no, you couldn't say that."

She gave Aunt Jaanne a detailed description of how she was

received by the nurse in charge of the ward and how she had given the fruit and cookies and candy to be handed out. But one part, a bag of cherries, she had given to Otto himself when they went walking in the sun along the path in the woods.

"I kept feeding him a few at a time," she said. "But he wanted to take them out of the bag himself. I was always afraid he'd slobber juice on his clothes, but it wasn't so bad." Later, after Aunt Jaanne had gone, she told me that he was sloppily dressed, with his shorts held up by a rope instead of suspenders or a belt. "And his shoes," she said. "I don't see how they can fit onto his feet in such a crazy way. There's not enough staff, but the people do their best."

She also told me that Otto had said several times, "To mother."

"Mother is at home; she'll come some other time," she had answered.

"Mother home," he had yelled out then. He had cried when she went away late in the afternoon.

A week later Aunt Jaanne came to our house one evening just after supper. "They're starting to come after them," she said. "They're coming and getting them. No more summonses, they just come and get them. They came and got the Allegro family. Do you know them?"

"No, I don't know them," my mother said.

Aunt Jaane wanted me to go to the hospital right away and ask for a paper certifying that Uncle Hans was seriously ill. I went, and at the main entrance I was directed to one of the wings, where I handed over my note at an office. After ten minutes I was presented a white sealed envelope and took it home to Aunt Jaanne.

The next evening she appeared for a second time. She asked me if I would go again. "It says in it that he's seriously ill; that should be mortally ill," she said. "I don't know if they'll put that in," I answered, "but we'll see."

After the head nurse had taken Aunt Jaanne's note and the first certificate, I waited a quarter of an hour and was given a new letter.

"Do you know what, Simon," Aunt Jaanne said two evenings later. "You'll have to go one more time and ask if they can make a whole new paper giving the nature of the illness in it. The nature of the illness. And not in Latin; if it has to be, in German, but at

any rate so it's understandable."

She gave me back the last certificate, but without any accompanying note. I set off for the hospital again.

"Mrs. Boslowits asks if the nature of the illness can be given in it," I said. "And it's better if it's not in Latin." The head nurse took the envelope and came back a little later.

"Will you wait a bit?" she asked. After some time I received a sealed envelope, exactly the same as the others.

I went at once to deliver it, and I found Aunt Jaanne and Hansie both sitting in front of the bay window. The room was almost completely dark. The draperies were open and the curtain pushed aside, so they could see the street from the window.

"Look, that's fine," Aunt Jaanne said when she read the paper.

"Did you think that would do any good?" Hans asked.

"Of course," I answered. "He knows, he knows," I said.

"What are you saying?" asked Aunt Jaanne.

"I was humming," I said.

Not only my mother but other friends of the Boslowits family who dropped by in the evenings spoke about the situation in gloomy wonderment. "It's just like a haunted house," my mother said.

I went there regularly in the evenings, and everything was always the same. I would ring the bell, the apartment door would be unlocked, and by the time I entered the hall, Aunt Jaanne would already be back inside. When I came into the living room, Aunt Jaanne would be sitting to the left in the bay window and Hansie to the right. Once I was inside Aunt Jaanne would leave her post again for a moment to scurry into the hall and lock the door. When I went away they would follow me and lock the door after me, and by the time I was in the street I could see them already sitting like statues in front of the window again. Then I would make a motion of waving, but they never reacted.

One Tuesday morning some neighbors of theirs came to tell us that about half past eight the night before two policemen with black helmets had come. Aunt Jaanne had shown them the certificate from the hospital, and one of them threw the beam of a flashlight on it. "Who are you?" he had asked Hansie. When he had identified himself, the other man said, "He's not on the list." "Both of you

have to come with us," the first one had said then.

Uncle Hans said nothing when he heard the news. They thought he hadn't heard or hadn't really understood, and they repeated it emphatically several times. He tried to raise himself up, and after they had put a pillow behind his back he sat looking out of the window. Finally the visitors, a friend of Aunt Jaanne's and her daughter, went home again.

One day some time later a neighbor came to visit. "They are emptying the Invalide," she said. She had watched while hundreds of very old people were carried down the stairs and out of the building to vehicles standing ready for them. One ninety-two-year-old man whom she thought she had known once had called out, "They're waiting on me hand and foot." "The Apeldoorn Woods were emptied yesterday too," she said.

"What did you say about Otto?" I asked my mother when she came back from her next visit to Uncle Hans.

"The truth—that everything was taken away," she said. "He only hopes he's put to death right away. The doctors and nurses stayed with the patients, did you know that?"

"No," I said, "I didn't know."

Early the following week a friend of Uncle Hans's hired a cab and took him from the hospital to an attic room he had been able to arrange for him at some friends' in the center of town. Late that night he also took the wheelchair—the tires had already been stolen from it—from the entryway of Uncle Hans's house. It was only four days until everything in the apartment was taken away, but it was agreed not to tell Uncle Hans for the time being.

He lay there all alone in his new location, but a nurse came twice a day to look after him. Only a few people knew where he was.

During the summer everything went as well as could be hoped for. But when fall came, another hiding place for Uncle Hans had to be found, because a stove couldn't be used in his room.

They succeeded in obtaining a place for him in an old people's home. The papers would be taken care of.

When he was told the decision, he showed his disappointment. He explained he would rather be taken in by friends.

Sometimes he didn't seem to know what he was saying; one

afternoon he said to the nurse, "Do you still remember when I was twenty-seven? No, I mean 1927. I know exactly what I mean, so—" and after that he lay lost in thought.

One Wednesday a friend, a woman who was an artist, was visiting him. "You like that atlas such a lot, don't you?" he asked. "Tell me the truth, now." He had an atlas of the world that was supposed to be very extensive and valuable, and friends had been able to rescue it from his apartment.

When the nurse came that afternoon, he said, "Take that atlas along, I've given it to Ali."

"What nonsense," she said, "it's much too nice to give away."

"Take it along, I said." Then he asked for something to drink.

The following day the daughter of Aunt Jaanne's friend came and found him asleep. "He's sleeping," she said at home. In the evening the nurse came again, found him resting, took his pulse, and left satisfied. The next morning she came back at the usual time and found his body already cold. She lifted up the head; its little tuft of hair felt damp to the touch. The thin mouth was closed, and the glasses gave the face an unreal expression.

"I didn't understand it all right away," she said later. "And I thought I heard something strange, but it was a carpet sweeper on the ground floor."

When she saw the empty box beside the glass of water, she began to comprehend. But she figured out that it couldn't have contained more than four sleeping tablets. The only conclusion was that he had regularly saved out one at a time and so built up a supply.

That night the friend who had taken him out of the hospital and the man who had given up the room for him together carried the body downstairs and noiselessly lowered it on a rope into the canal beside the house; it sank immediately, so I was told.

They both hurried back inside the house and waited together with the nurse until they could go home at four in the morning.

In the meanwhile they discussed all things: the distances of planets, the duration of the war, the existence of a god. The two men were also given a bit of information by the nurse: she was able to tell them that Uncle Hans's money could have served to maintain him for at least another year. "That wasn't the reason," she said.



Untitled pen drawing (1926), by Leo Gestel.
Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

From *The Dark Room of Damocles*

WILLEM FREDERIK HERMANS

Translated by Estelle Debrot

ONE OF THE prisoners withdrew from the group and came to sit next to Osewoudt after the sergeant, who was directing the game, had screamed something at him.

He was a boy of seventeen at the most. He had a high forehead and underneath it, in shallow sockets, the green wolf-eyes of the wildest Teutonic tribes.

"You are that Osewoudt, then? It is interesting to have a talk with you. Everyone has heard of your case. If you ask me, that investigation about Dorbeck is like walking in quicksand! Every step forward is also a step down. What do you think about it yourself?"

"That is none of your business."

"If you ask me, you are a big jackass, Osewoudt. I am not saying it to pester you, but it is the truth. Do you know what is wrong with most Dutchmen? They have never learned to think. Look at me. I joined the S.S. a year ago. I am a big amoral theorist. A theorist, because I cannot look at blood and besides that I joined the S.S. when Germany had already lost the war and other S.S. men were looking for a safe place in the resistance. I did not believe at all in the S.S., the thousand year old realm and all that nonsense that every S.S. man believed in, according to the papers. But what I do believe is that a moral principle is nothing more than a working hypothesis and that after a person's death every moral principle is over. You have probably not read very much, have you? I have. I am an intellectual. There were not many of them in the S.S. either. They were as big a bunch of dumbbells as the rest of the world. There were some that carried Himmler on their hands! Himmler! A sea cow with a lorgnette! They thought that Hitler was a genius! Hitler! An epileptic mongrel! They believed, for God's sake, in a better future. If it was left to me, I'd stand them all up against the wall,

now, here, right this minute!"

He pointed to the fagged out men doing games.

"Look at them trotting. Ridiculous. Do you know what it is all about? Do you know what it all boils down to? It all comes down to the fact that the human being is mortal and that he does not want to believe it. But for the person who knows that he has to die once, there can be no absolute moral principle, for him mercy and goodness are nothing more than disguises of fear. Why should I behave morally, if I am going to be sentenced to death in any case? Everyone gets a death sentence once and everyone knows it.

"The scatter-brained philosophers who have made our Western culture thought there was a difference between guilt and innocence. But I say: in a world where everyone is sentenced to death, there can be no difference between guilt and innocence. And then compassion! Of course, like all the other imbeciles in our country, you have never read a real book. But if you get the opportunity, you should run through *Richard the Third* of Shakespeare! Shakespeare, that was a man who understood what it was all about. What happens when Richard's Kingdom is about to fall and he is preparing for the decisive battle?

"He sleeps and in his dream appear all of the friends and relatives he has had murdered in order to climb the throne. Do you know what they say? What do you think? Do you think that they say: Richard, it was mean of you to have murdered us, but nothing can be done about it now, it has already happened, we cannot return to life any more, we forgive you for what you have done to us, we hope you will be spared our miserable fate, since even if you are punished for your crimes, *we* would not be better off for it. . . . Do you think that is what they say, Osewoudt? No, my good fellow, they do not say that. *Despair and die!* they say. That is what they say: *Despair and die!* Women, children and the aged. *Despair and die*, they say! Shakespeare saw it!

"Take Dostoyevsky. In Dostoyevsky appear people who are gentle, good-hearted, noble, generous, holy, but they are all, without exception, insane. That is the way it is. The human being is only good by calculation, madness or cowardice.

"And now I'm coming to my point. Gradually this insight is

becoming more general. The old prophets and philosophers who have argued otherwise are losing more and more ground. You cannot hold back truth by autosuggestion. The human being will have to get used to living in a world without freedom, goodness and truth. Soon it will be taught in the primary schools! This war is just a foretaste of the world that is coming! The world is getting too overpopulated to leave room over for the mad, the good and the holy. Just as little as we think of witches, as sure as the sex taboos are disappearing, will our great grandchildren take for granted and, with a complete ease of mind and indifference, let things happen that still cause our taxpaying, voting cattle of today to shudder.

"The murder orgy of this war, the million defenseless that were gassed, beaten to death, starved to death, sprayed with burning phosphor from air planes, is all nothing as yet. Our grandchildren will not understand why newspapers wasted themselves lamenting about it. Persecution of the Jews? Remember what I say! Within twenty years or so the English, the Americans and the Russians will let the Arabs wipe out the Jews if that suits their purpose.

"May I wish you lots of success with your case, Osewoudt?"

The men who had been doing games were assembled. The young S.S. boy sprang up to join them. But after a couple of steps, he turned to Osewoudt and said: "Or they will let the Jews wipe out the Arabs. My consolations!"

The Powers That Be

HARRY MULISCH

Translated by James Brockway

NIGHT had not yet fallen, though it was no longer evening now. The day balanced precariously, like a coin stood up on edge. Set free by the dusk, the evening star glittered in solitude. The streets were gray craters of desolation, stretching out towards the dead bloom of the heavens, where the light still lingered. Shivering as he went, Mr. Tiennoppen walked at the side of a colleague he'd just been doing a spot of overtime with, and peered up at the sky. A few minutes more and the blue, the purple, the color would desert the earth, like a protective coating falling away. Odorless Eternity would be released, the menacing firmament.

Mr. Tiennoppen could feel an unbearable anxiety taking hold of him, benumbing his throat. To be home . . . the lights on . . . in bed beneath the blankets . . . to sleep . . . to be dead! . . . Trembling, he riveted his eyes on the world and looked at the disconsolate houses, the disconsolate sidewalks, at the unconsolable unconsolableness of the unconsolable cheer in family parlors . . .

"What an evening, what an evening!" sighed his colleague, gesticulating with an arm. "And this wonderfully mild weather we're having!" He laughed and drew deep draughts into his lungs. "You know, Tiennoppen, I was just thinking of that evening six months ago, in the middle of the winter, when I was showing my friend, the chief inspector of police, out. You know him, Haversmit, with that comical nose of his! He's the only one of my friends whom I could imagine saying to me under given circumstances: 'Hans, I hereby condemn you to death!' Ha! ha! We'd been talking of the old days and I was showing him out. And there he was, lying flat on his nose! The streets were slipperier than I'd ever known them—it had thawed and then frozen over again. He couldn't manage to get to his feet again, so I got hold of his legs and simply tugged him indoors. You should have seen it! The chief inspector, a prey to the

elements! He was rather peeved too—who wouldn't be, falling on your nose?—and of course there was no question of going by car. And then it came, Tiennoppen, then it came! 'I'll just phone them,' he said. And what did he do? He ordered them to strew all the streets in town with salt and sand. We had one more drink together and a quarter of an hour later the truck came past, one of thirty or forty. Then he stepped gingerly into his car and drove quietly home. There you have the advantages of a chief inspectorship. You just pick up the phone. What d'you say to that?"

Mr. Tiennoppen had nothing to say to that. He stared palely into the idiotic dark between the stars. Arms and hands, the size of planets, might suddenly shoot out of them, take hold of men and nip them between the fingernails like fleas. Mr. Tiennoppen looked about the streets, scared to the verge of tears. There were few people about. Those there were hastened on their grubby way from street lamp to street lamp, taking refuge now and again in a house to which they possessed the key. The town pursued its existence, colorless, deserted. For how long would it still go on doing so. No color, no scent . . . The town would go on existing like this without the powers that be ever doing anything about it, and the people, what became of them? Could life go on being like this . . . ? Mr. Tiennoppen felt deeply moved.

"I'll just phone," he said, "if you'll excuse me for a moment." And he hurried into a booth.

Puzzled, his colleague waited for him. Now and then he took a peek at Mr. Tiennoppen, who stayed in the illuminated booth for minutes on end and seemed to be laying increasing emphasis on his words as he spoke into the mouthpiece, accompanying them now and then by gestures. It looked as though he was endeavoring to persuade someone to do something. When Tiennoppen eventually emerged from the booth and volunteered no explanation but started off again down the street without saying a word, his colleague decided not to lose face by asking any questions. He didn't know why, but suddenly he felt sad or irritated, he couldn't be sure which. He held his tongue and walked on surlily at Mr. Tiennoppen's side.

Suddenly he thought everything depressing and Godforsaken. With dislike his mind dwelt on his room which he'd be entering in

half an hour. Everything would be lying exactly as he'd left it—the papers on his desk, his dressing gown tossed across the bed, the coffee grinder on the table. No beloved hand would have created order or disorder here during his absence, no endearing change would have been effected. It was high time he married; being alone was becoming unbearable—could a human being exist without somebody to make changes for him? He glanced at Mr. Tiennoppen walking at his side. A man to envy—he had a wife and children. With a sigh he let his eyes wander over the street. He disliked this neighborhood; it was always gray and silent like this, each side-street stretching out like some dreary gully of bricks and stone, dead-straight. . . .

His attention caught by the screeching noise of an automobile driving in bottom gear, he looked round. A truck was coming slowly up to them. He looked ahead again but immediately swung round once more, his steps decelerating. What were they up to there? Something was happening in the street. The truck drew nearer so that now another, a humming, sound became audible. He stopped and craned his head forward. A moment later he was swallowing a cry of astonishment.

Attached to the truck was a funnel-shaped rotating machine on two wheels, and out of it, yes, out of it thousands of flowers were shooting and spouting out over the street: roses, tulips, orchids, daisies, hyacinths, irises, poppies, lilacs, wisteria, jasmine, marguerites, fuchsias, magnolias—oh, far too many to give names to all of them. As far as the eye could see the cobbles of the street lay submerged under an orgy of flowers. Now the truck was quite near them and standing in the back of it was a workman of the municipality, shovelling the flowers, pound by pound, into the rotating drum, which immediately spouted them out in all directions over the street and sidewalks, right up to the houses. Even the window ledges were layered with them, and they hung as well from the street lamps and door knobs. As the truck passed by, Mr. Tiennoppen and his colleague were literally machine gunned by the spattering stream of flowers that landed in the brims of their hats and caught in their coats. And now these municipality trucks were advancing down the side streets in all directions, paving the roads and squares with their cargoes, so that everything became color, everything fragrance.

It remained quiet for a moment or two longer, and then the people came tumbling out of their houses and ran cheering down the streets, plucking up fistfuls of flowers and showering them over each other's heads as they went. Children fell flat on their faces into them and imitated the motions of swimming in them; old people let themselves fall slowly backwards into them, gently turning over as they covered themselves with flowers and lying there motionless. And again a batch of trucks arrived, belching out a new layer of blossoms over the first layer, and another and another, so that the sea soon crept up to the window panes and everyone went mad with happiness. Men and women, flowers up to their waists, went wading through the streets, singing; many had already disappeared from sight, undulating movements in the sea of blossoms being the only indication of their presence, gurgling and whispering, under the surface.

Mr. Tiennoppen's colleague could no longer budge from the place where he was standing amid the eye-dazzling color, the nostril-dragging fragrance. His legs quake beneath him, a dandelion in his ear, he looked at Mr. Tiennoppen, who was beaming with satisfaction.

"They didn't want to do it to begin with," he said, "but I insisted."

Operation Garbage

HARRY MULISCH

Translated by James Brockway

ALTHOUGH HE KNEW they were in order, Mr. Tiennoppen checked the addresses once more in the light of a street lamp, before sliding his letters into the mailbox. Then he began the slow walk back home along the nocturnal canals. It was three o'clock. Not a movement, not a sound—you couldn't count the hum of cars far in the distance that only emphasized the silence. Now my words and sentences will lie all night long, unknown, unread, in that vermillion monster, Mr. Tiennoppen mused. Unread, unwritten; unheard, unsaid; unseen, un . . . what?

The night was silent, vast. The houses, the metallic water, everything, seemed submerged in unfathomable astonishment at its own existence. The bridge humped over from quay to quay, speechless. Mr. Tiennoppen crossed it, humming quietly to himself, caught sight of a wooden cartwheel floating in the water, fell silent, and then stood staring, popeyed, rigid with amazement.

There, underneath a lamp on the lefthand side of the following canal, quite close to the water's edge, there it was—what five minutes ago had not been there. There it was now. A horse, scraggy, dead, collapsed between the shafts of its cart and half buried under fruit and vegetables. A greengrocer's cart, it was. The front axle broken and one wheel missing, it hung sagging over the edge of the quay and had scattered its apples and its cauliflowers all over the place . . . And when Mr. Tiennoppen had run to the spot, was standing speechless in the middle of the mess, had realized how long the horse must have been dead, how black and rotten and shrivelled all the food was, and saw no one about in the night, not a greengrocer, not a policeman, not a single soul in sight, the shouts surged out of his breast, his voice battered against the façades of the houses.

A few seconds later lights broke out over these façades, windows opened, and silence was rudely enjoined upon Mr. Tiennoppen.

"But look, why don't you?" he cried out, all atremble. "A horse! It's been dead for weeks! There's mouldy fruit lying all over the place!" The sounds clawed across the water like a gigantic hand.

"What's that to do with us? Stop that racket, you're waking everybody up!"

"Mustn't disturb people's sleep," said a voice just behind Mr. Tiennoppen. He started and whisked round. It was a policeman.

"Constable, constable, just look! Five minutes ago there was nothing here, nothing!"

The police constable placidly sized up the damage in the yellow glint of the street lamp.

"It's right you are," he nodded. "But don't you be worrying your head about it any longer. You just run along and don't make any more noise. Good night!"

He touched his cap and went slowly on his way, hands folded across his back.

When all the lights had been extinguished again and the policeman had disappeared, Mr. Tiennoppen felt the strength flow back into his legs. He ran to a telephone booth a few yards away and started searching madly through the directory for the number of a carrier. He found what he was looking for, but it was a long time before an answer came from the other end of the line. They were to come at once with five men and a large truck. Yes, in the middle of the night! Now, at once!

"It'll cost you thirty smackers, father."

"I don't care what it costs!"

After the elapse of half an hour during which Mr. Tiennoppen had stood stiff, pressed against the wall as though awaiting the arrival of the firing squad, his eyes fixed all the time on the horse, on the cart . . . after half an hour the truck finally turned up. Mr. Tiennoppen shot forward and pointed at the roadway.

"Everything must be cleared away, down to the last plum!"

"Thirty cracklers, if I may be so free," said the carrier, shooting out his hand from where he was seated behind the steering wheel.

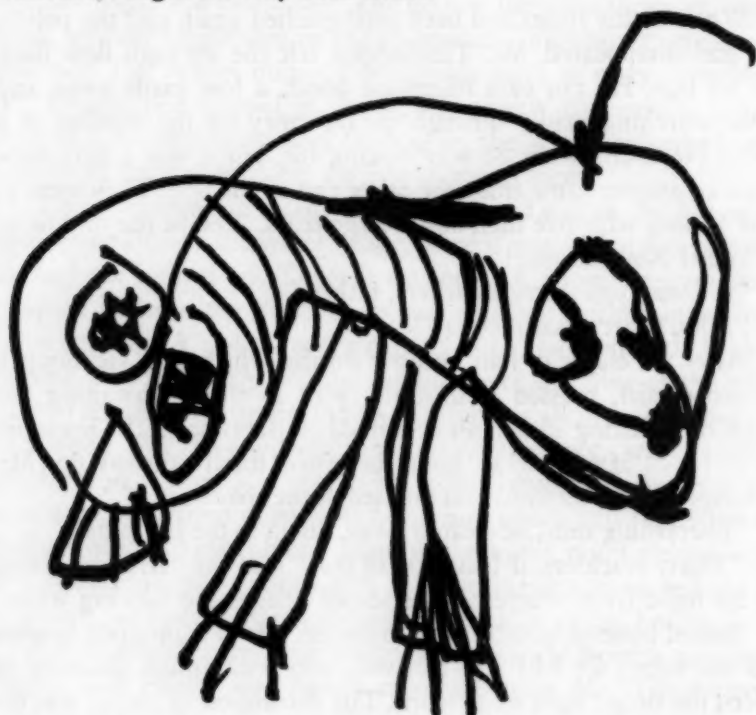
Buried beneath glances of compassion, Mr. Tiennoppen handed over the salary he had just received, and with much shouting of orders, the sleepy men set to work. The decomposing corpse was the

first thing to disappear into the back of the truck, followed by the cart, which fell to pieces everywhere they laid a hand on it. Supervised by a now deadly pale Mr. Tiennoppen, the men then collected up the rotting fruit and vegetables, sweeping away the last remains of it with their brooms, stole one more glance of astonishment at their patron, took leave of him, and with a roar of the engine drove the truck away. After which, silence once more took the world in its grip.

Mr. Tiennoppen cast his eyes once again over the tidied up quayside, caught sight in the distance of the floating wheel as it disappeared into the black hole under the bridge, and suddenly shouted out, fists brandished: "And if I'm the last man on earth, as long as I am alive and breathing, doom shall not descend!"

Taken aback by his own behavior, Mr. Tiennoppen looked around him.

"Death has no qualms for me," he mumbled and, small and hunched, sought his way back home.



ANIMALS, ink sketch by Karel Appel. Municipal Museum, Amsterdam

Prelude

A. ROLAND HOLST

Translated by Claire Nicolas

I

Over the lands, at evenfall, are sweeping by
The rains of autumn. Infinitely great
Now seem the barren solitudes of death.
Pale foams the ocean over the low beaches.

And by the window, thinking of what fled
I hear around my walls the moan of ages.
From tired hands my final deed has fallen.
I see it, pale and still, lie in my lap.

Let us no longer cling to hope. Let us
No more implore, and oh, disdain no more.
This is the end, this is the dark'ning tide
Of heavy clouds and of the storming leaves.
My final deeds have fallen from my hands.
The rain is driving by us as before.

II

What fools are they who dearly bargained for
Such earthly bliss as sings mindless of dying.
There's but a rustle now where once was loving.
Where now the raven croaks we once heard singing.

We build until the word is wrested from us.
The cities stand on graveyards in the wind
And when futility asserts itself
Then still does death have to be forced upon us.

But then, what of the dream? Thousands are roaming
Along the ways, towards the bronzen portals
Of yonder temple, locked and towering
But even there the wind howls and death reigns
And hearts which once were ringing with new births
There shyly shuffle o'er the gloomy threshold.

III

The silver wind whirls through the open night,
Waving and like a sea; the foam flares high
To where, beyond the dizzy, golden moon
The starry watch falls back before its light.
The earth has been swept clean, despised and bare,
And cast away as a wornout illusion.
Between the round moon and its desolation
The wind is chosing shadows everywhere.
For gathered from about, then to disperse,
The wind whirled seed and life to where arise
Ultimate walls of ice-eternity—
And this cold universe emptied of all
But moon and wind and my wide-open eyes
Falling down time into infinity.

Outcast

J. J. SLAUERHOFF

Translated by James Brockway

The coast of Africa, a broad, gray face,
Composed, after century on century
Of pain untold, in an inviolable peace,
Stares down aloof upon the tortured sea.
For us, the shameful longing for the shore:
No sea, no ocean, can assuage our lust,
Nothing, not even roving, brings us rest,
For us, the only sanctuary, the whore.
With her, who waits where we are sure to go
—Each time a different face, each time the same—
For one brief hour we lay our longing low.
And the firmaments which once went skimming by
Over our heads, a pattern new each time,
Have shrivelled at last, become the unchanging sky.

Behind the Silence

HERMAN VAN DEN BERGH

Translated by E. Krispijn

The singers of the ashlar light
working the treadmill of its praise
are silent. Now, born heart, now raise
a humble song, because day is blind.

Shepherd and dog went warmly past
the shadow of the ear of corn:
we are all that moves in this forlorn
vale in which shades of doom are cast.

When did we look upon the world
with eyes of lust, round with desire?
and when did we touch the world
with a mouth of fire?

Shuffling, unreasoning, pair by pair,
behind this silence did we leave
nought but the small, scorched maidenhair.
Moist waft the footsteps which we leave.

Watch it lessening; watch the changing green
leaning towards the night; and see
how space from flowers' hearts does bleed.

See the evening and the crimson reeds.

The Soldier Who Crucified Christ

MARTINUS NIJHOFF

Translated by James Brockway

We nailed him to the cross. His fingers bled,
Clutched wildly round the nail as I raised my hammer.
Yet softly his voice pronounced my name. He said,
Love me—and his secret was mine forever.

I become a madman, demanding blood of love,
I twist a laugh away, my teeth I grit:
I love him and I smite and smite and smite,
And drive the nail home till the timber's split.

Now, like an idiot, a nail through my own palm,
I trace a fish—his name, his monogram—
On every wall I find, on every beam and tree,
Or in my breast, or, crouching, in the sand,
And answer those who stop to question me:
"He took a nail and drove it through my hand."

Ad Infinitum

MARTINUS NIJHOFF

Translated by James S Holmes

The servant girl throws out the slaughtered lamb's
blood from the bowl. You lay new wood beside
the hearth, woman whose womb my voice preserves.
The mirror gleams. The veal hangs in the flame.

Deep in the woods a bearing she-wolf cries,
and my forefather who came in the door
lifts up what he took from the lair as whelp
and now's become a child, pale, without hair.

We stand one moment, he, I, and the tot
leaning on his shoulder, and gaze at this
familiar scene: a white room, filled with light,

filled with the smell of veal and new-sawn wood,
filled with brief joy constantly formed anew,
a homestead on a clearing in the woods.

Three Poems by Gerrit Achterberg

Translated by James Brockway

Grave

You grant me access to these stones
with the same tenderness
as, time was, to your side.
Death, it seems, did nothing more
than fold you in another dress:
this place with you identified,
gravel,
blind sand,
flower:
sanctified,
o, sanctified.

Divining Rod

You have made yourself a part of that
which men call world, my habitat.
Needle in a haystack which I find
at every point where I admit
a poem to life: o, you are not
hidden from my eyes, my hands—
staring, I grope for you through the brands,
the fires of Chaos, to isolate
you from Creation, whole, complete.

House

House, I still inhabit you.
In my mind your lamps burn on
as though my mind and you were one:
time nor distance cannot strew
their intervening shadows in
between the light of now and then.

Dark, your objects gleam in me,
heavy with eternity:
death can differ no whit from this
except that here I still possess
the time in which it settles down,
becomes a poem.

About My Children

LEO VROMAN

Translated by the author

I have wondered if my fingers were
wiry and willing enough to tear
a succulent human body apart;
but I feel the sand in my dry heart
sag about, my thirst for death
rustle with drought.
I can hardly fight
—leave alone hate—
the boiled cow tendons on my plate.
Then whom can I stretch between fork and teeth
if even an infant hides beneath
its lunchable and buttered skin
worse bunches of wild strings within
coiling tubes, tough loops, tight rings?
To rip the softest human things
teeth and fingers are not enough:
a tired warrior needs a knife
to open up the locks of life,
and even then may not succeed
to split the bones that will not bleed,
and even then may not possess
the screamy force with which to press
jelly from a child's jelliness.

Though once, upon a long night's wrangling
with a multiple, a screaming welt,
man emerged (some strange limbs dangling
from his fresh and red and hairy belt)
still wondering how it would have felt
to be strangled instead of strangling,
the sun would rise, the dead fat melt

out of his tearful souvenirs,
and thought would feast upon his fears.
Hence the invention of the stone:
the killer now stands clean, alone.
Too far from his empty hand
somebody falls, while he must stand
cold, with no dead torso near
enough to bleed out loud: "at once, atone."

Since the invention of the spear
death is becoming less severe.
As fear has flown,
where has the joy of killing gone?
Our tools have robbed us of our force,
they suck our hands for intercourse
and feed upon our lusts, upon
deed, glee, remorse.

Too fast arises modern death,
too dull a traveler goes its course
too far to hear the friendly breath
clog, to see the friendly flesh
bulge, before it bursts to mesh.
The air through which clean weapons roar
—adventure in their shells—
turns not much cloudier than before;
what may be raining smells
not of a foreign girl's fresh gore;
no whisp, no warmth tells.

With bright screams
of despair nor hope
a deaf beam aims
its telescope.
No little master
begs or weeps.
The victim dreams.

The killer sleeps.
Sleeps since the birth of his long deed
through a revenge he does not need:
in wreaths and soil (or otherwise)
the flesh has softly fallen from
his hand that set the living bomb.
The larvae in his livid eyes,
eating the path that sunlight eats,
have bitten through his ripe disguise,
to blacken, buzz with horror, rise.

Not long, until a new sun heats
houses in which the twisted sheets
will swell and burst with flies.

What shall I sing when war comes back
to burn my singing children black,
thin, pale peace dove?

What shall I hang, when all this fails,
among my long and limp entrails
to spell out l o v e

Paestum

L. TH. LEHMANN

Translated by the author

The seabreeze blows
through laurel-roses
and roofless Doric columns.
Lean children raspingly cough
under the tourists' sun.

Burdens are carried
on vespas, women's heads,
wedgeshaped oxcarts
and blue busses trumpeting two notes.

For three millennia
people here died in their houses,
while in the open door
neighbors and children
were sniggering, talking and watching.

Brown earth razed,
by pick and shovel
becomes a flying grey dust,
out of which one gleaming fragment
of vase, Lucanian,
with, brickred among black, an angle
of a swaying chiton, the pleats
still severely almost Attic,
seems more than living things
to people the air and light
between the columns
and under the temples' pediments,
that once like eagles
flapped wings over their builders.

Poems by Hans Lodeizen

Translated by James Brockway

Romance

he wound up the night oh
so gently, so supply, that
it vanished between his fingers
we looked about us and
how big the silence was.

here only a moment ago there was
an enchanted palace where we were
spending the evening pleasantly,
lying in our armchairs as though
stretched out on the sand.

the great learned eyes of the windows
were asleep and the chatter in the
silver chandeliers had stopped
as though someone had suddenly entered the room.

the logs lay mindless in the grate
as though it was ages ago
they had finally relinquished
their hereditary silence.

where was the voice that went
clothed in the knowledge
of all the miracles
we stared ahead of us
a little pensively

where was the voice where were
the days so lightheartedly angled
it was still in the room we dreamed
like lonely castles in the night.

when I was still living
in a medieval castle and the world
rode pleasantly on its way
I was knight and castellan of my pleasure—

but now I inhabit a narrow
room in an alien house
yet through my eyes the waters
stream and on the rock of my ear
sings the Lorelei.

“voice wise yet stammering . . .”

People of course will say again:
no you don't speak for us
your voice is an internal thunderstorm,
not in my line, you can count me out
people will turn their backs on me

and they're right of course they're right
but a thunderstorm no soft music
on a spinet issuing from
a summerhouse suspended from cobwebs
on a Sunday morning with a princess

how far the calendar is
from my hands, how high time hangs
above my head I laugh
out of sheer bewilderment I weep
out of pure chagrin I live
they say I am a living being

I have responsibilities
I might die they say
and then they say . . .

.

Jim, I'd like to know
what makes it worth your while
to go on writing
letters, essays, poems
in which you praise the world
expertly assessing its worth
like some merchant.
how is it you never grow
tired and close your eyes and
think I wish they'd all go
to hell with their matter
and go on writing
letters, essays, poems
from which I can recognize
you and meet you laughing
and giving me courage
for I'm so tired and while
I'm speaking hope's seeping away
Jim, what makes it worth your while
to go on writing
letters, essays, poems . . . etc.

Poems by Lucebert

Translated by E. A. and H. R. Kousbroek

I

Slowly I begin to play the game of ancient kings:

Opir who forsook his people
After three cups of wine
After two cups of wine
Consigned his treasures to the belly of the sea.

Hassal, taster of spice cakes,
He staked his life on rarer condiments.
1000 miles hither and yon
His strong lips upon stronger lay:
Renounced the greatest bakers of his court.

Hikkim, son of Mussah,
Who, yet a boy, behind the fans
Unpromisingly skulked.
3 evenings from the coronation's splendour
With the lowest nautch-girl, the lowest,
Vanished in the mists of the mountains . . .
His golden rings lay with the little Jews.

So does it come to pass with the substantial
Grey lips upon grey lips
Have said it and have sung it.

But Naitta, queen now and forever,
Naitta, who loathed the light,
Wrote in the dusk
The 700 incomparable rules of government;
She died like a living stone.
One of the holiest
Of all men, Vipacchit,

He was condemned to infernal torment:
Vipacchit a certain night
In which he could have begot an angel,
Had omitted intercourse.

II

The tobacco frames the lips with its ring-finger
The tobacco makes a ring of lips
The tobacco makes a ring of air
The blue air is encircled by red-blue lips.

The tobacco wears a too-wide coat
The tobacco can ride around in its too-wide coat
It rides on a curved pipe
A straight face rides along.

The curved pipe rides in the open lips
The straight face rides in the surrounding air
The tobacco is their guide
It points to the high blue air
It praises the low purple lips
Both are blissful.

The face and the pipe sing
The red lips dance around the blue air
And the tobacco gently
Smells and smiles.

Foreign Country

HANS ANDREUS

Translated by the author

I wanted to bow
before fruits surrounded
by horizons and clouds bedded on clouds.

I wanted to tickle
the golden face of the sun:
blow, dragon.

I wanted to laugh with animals;
I wanted to lodge wayfarers in my inn:
give them the best beds we have
and the best women and the best fare,
all free.

I wanted to put just before me
trees and steeples and the clean-shaven highway
and the blundering bug in the grass
and the autumn leaf of three autumns ago:
very old maid—

I wanted to put before me
whatever world and bow before it
in amazement and friendship: salaam.

And all this happens—but I
haunted by I don't know what
poor kind of poor devil, I
gape at the miracles with eyes too hasty; too eager a
visitor of a foreign country.

Calling Love Names

HANS ANDREUS

Translated by the author

A rolling fruit biting back;
the sharpest eyelash of the night;
a beautiful monster on velvet feet,
holy beast nailing us with misery
and happiness;

and an earth by night
sipping its seven sips of moon;
and an earth by day
drinking away its seven times seven
draughts of sun;

thus I call love names, because
lovers do not know where they travel,
come out upon a bursting silence,
fall into crevices of pain
and happiness—

and must speak, must babble after
the long cry of the silence.

Poems by Remco Campert

Translated by James Brockway

Breathing

I

The white light,
motorbikes in the distance,
my breath: morning
of thin music.

Abandoned
like an empty box
I remember adrift on water,
I wait for the wind.

2

The yellow, the extinguished winter,
the melting sun
and the trip-trip of a bird
across the dumb snow . . .

The wood of the trees
has grown one year older,
but in ever more branches
I gather my green.

Silver Talk

Silver talk in parks,
the sun a golden boy
poses with body tensed
for the girls on the gravel paths,
who twirl their senses round
and round, like parasols.



A SOMEBODY (1956), ink drawing by Corneille. State Museum, Amsterdam

(Continued from page 146)
ily," in 1946. The year following, his controversial novel, *The Evenings*, appeared. *The Acrobat* (1956), a volume of stories, was written in English.

J. J. SLAUERHOFF (1898-1936)—one of the most important authors of the period between World War I and II—wrote three novels, several volumes of stories, a play and many volumes of poetry, including *The Forbidden Empire* and *Life on Earth* (both novels), and *Foam and Ashes* (short stories). His *Collected Poems* have been published several times in two volumes.

M. VASALIS (1909-), pseudonym of Dr. M. Drooglever-Forstyn-Leenmans, doctor and psychiatrist, is considered one of the most personal poets who began to publish around 1940. Chief works: *Parks and Deserts* (1941) and *The Phoenix Bird* (1947), both poetry.

ADRIAAN VAN DER VEEN (1916-)—novelist, short story writer and critic—is literary editor of the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*. Chief works: *Wings Have We* (1946), *Nurse At Sea* (1949), *The Intruder* (1952), *Playing in the Dark* (1955), *Putting Up An Act* (1960)—all realistic novels. *The Intruder* has been published in the United States (Abelard-Schuman).

SIMON VESTDIJK (1898-), the most original and prolific writer in contemporary Holland, has published seven volumes of short stories, including translations of Poe and Conan Doyle; scores of novels; twenty-one volumes of poetry, including translations of Emily Dickinson; many vol-

umes of essays; and a book on the future of religion.

LEO VROMAN (1915-), a biologist now with the American Museum of Natural History, New York City, has written several volumes of "irrational, fantastic" poetry of great originality. He is also the author of a short novel, *Tineke* (1948).

BEB VUYK (1905-) was born in Indonesia and lived for many years on the deserted island of Buru in the Moluccas. She has written novels and recently published a volume of short stories, *Sound and Fury* (1959). She now is an Indonesian citizen.

Artists:

KAREL APPEL (1921-) — a founder of the Dutch experimental group, "Reflex," and the international group, "Cobra"—has won the UNESCO award (1954) and the International Guggenheim award (1960). He has murals in the Amsterdam Town Hall and the Municipal Museum and in the new UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

GERRIT BENNER (1897-) was a tradesman in various capacities until he was suddenly discovered as an artist in 1945, at the age of forty-eight. Since then he has exhibited widely, winning important prizes and awards.

CORNEILLE (Cornelis G. van Beverloo, b. Liège, 1922) is a founder, with Appel, of the "Reflex" and "Cobra" experimental groups. He has had many one-man shows in Europe and the United States, winning honors and awards at the International Carnegie (Pittsburgh) and the International Guggenheim.

M. C. ESCHER (1898-), graphic artist, has exhibited widely. His woodcut, "Three Spheres," reproduced here, is a purchase of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

LEO GESTEL (1881-1941) was a "divisionist" until 1911 when, on a trip to Paris, he turned to "cubism."

FRISO TEN HOLT (b. 1921, Argelès-Gazost, France) studied under his father. He worked at first in France and Italy, now in the Netherlands.

HERMAN J. KRUYDER (1881-1935) —at successive times house painter, decorator, and artist in a stained glass factory—became an important expressionist painter under the influence of Chagall and Rousseau le douanier.

LUCEBERT: see Authors.

C. ROELOFSZ (1898-) spent part of his youth in Indonesia and Bolivia. In 1927 he came under the influence of the futurist, Carra. Since 1956 he has served as a professor at the State Academy, Amsterdam. He has published several books with drawings.

HENDRIK N. WERKMAN (1882-1945) —journalist, printer, experimenter in typography, and painter—exhibited widely. As a printer, he played an important part in the resistance movement and was caught and shot by the Germans in April, 1945.

Translators:

JAMES T. BROCKWAY—teacher, writer, literary advisor, and editor—has published many translations of Netherlands literature.

ALEX BROTHERTON (b. Sydney, Australia, 1919) lives in London. He has translated for *Delta*.

N. C. CLEGG (1907-) lives in London. In addition to translations, she writes for various Netherlands magazines about life in Great Britain.

ESTELLE DEBROT (b. San Francisco, 1904) has published a book of poems and several short stories. Wife of the Antillan-Dutch writer, Cola Debrot, she has translated two of his books. Her translations have also appeared in the *Atlantic*, *Delta*, *Black Orpheus*.

ROY EDWARDS (1918-) has translated novels and stories by Tip Marugg, Marga Minco, Johan Fabricius, Willem F. Hermans, Harry Mulisch . . .

JAMES S HOLMES: see Editors.

E. KRISPIJN (1930-), essayist, worked in Thailand and Indonesia and now lives in Australia.

HANS VAN MARLE (1922-) is the managing editor of *Selected Studies on Indonesia* by Netherlands scholars.

ELIZABETH MEIJER-MOLLISON (b. Melbourne, Australia, 1930) has translated *Eduard van Beinum*, a study by Wouter Paap, and scholarly publications.

Editors:

JAMES S HOLMES (b. Iowa, 1924), writer and translator living in Amsterdam, is an editor of *Delta* and European editor of *Approach*.

EDUARD HOORNIK (1910-)—poet, playwright and essayist—is an editor of *Delta* and *De Gids*.

J. J. OVERSTEEGEN (1926-) is the director of the Foundation for the Promotion of the Translation of Dutch literary works.

Editorial Notes

(continued from inside front cover)
government shares in the sponsorship of both *Delta* and the Foundation. Neither institution is conceived or operated as a propaganda organ. Their function is simply to present, with the conviction that the presentation will argue its own worth.

The Editors of *The Literary Review* have followed *Delta* since the appearance of its first number, and some two years ago we learned of the availability of contemporary manuscripts through the Foundation for Translation. We air-mailed an inquiry to Amsterdam and with equal dispatch we received an enthusiastic reply from the Foundation that led to the publication of this Netherlands number. We are in debt to the many writers and their publishers and translators and to the artists who have made their work available. The Editors of *The Literary Review*, as always, assume final responsibility for the presentation.

This Netherlands number is the sixth in a series wholly concerned with the contemporary writing of a single foreign country. The others in the "foreign nations" series were devoted respectively to Israel (Spring 1958), Italy (Autumn 1959), the Philippines (Summer 1960), Turkey (Winter 1960-61), and India (Summer 1961). Similar numbers for other countries are in preparation. Several of the published numbers are the first anthologies of the literature of the country concerned to appear in the United States. All of them have been acclaimed both here and abroad—so much so that most of them are no longer available and have become "collectors' items." We are also pleased that the United States Information Agency, in consideration of their value as cul-

tural exchange, has regularly distributed copies among their centers throughout the world.

We believe this Netherlands number will prove similarly valuable for its worth as literature, its usefulness as cultural exchange, and its service in reminding United States publishers of a rich resource of manuscripts. In this last regard, we are happy to report that several of the authors represented in this number will soon be published in England and/or the United States, among them Simon Vestdijk, Willem F. Hermans and Harry Mulisch. We hope their work will be as successful as the novels of Maria Dermoût, in the splendid translations of Hans Koningsberger, published in this country some years ago.

The contributions of the Netherlands to the United States since our earliest beginnings have been enormous in depth and breadth. Teaneck, New Jersey, the home of *The Literary Review*, is only one of many centers in eastern United States where Dutch culture was first transplanted three hundred years ago; where cherished memorials of its continued influence over the centuries remain in old homes, historic sites, in place and family names, and in the annals of achievement; and where the descendants of Dutch pioneers continue their great tradition in today's civilization.

The writing in the pages that follow represents a cross section of contemporary Netherlands literature. The reader will make his own evaluations, but we cannot repress our enthusiasm for its literary merit or restrain our hope that this anthology will contribute to the enrichment of the cultural ties that have long united the peoples of the Netherlands and the peoples of the United States.

Netherlands Number

A. Roland Holst

L. Th. Lehmann

J. J. Slauerhoff

Simon Vestdijk

Adriaan Morriën

Hans Lodeizen

The

Literary

Review

H. Marsman

Adriaan van der Veen

Ch. Edgar du Perron

Harry Mulisch

M. Vasalis

Leo Vroman

Beb Vuyk

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